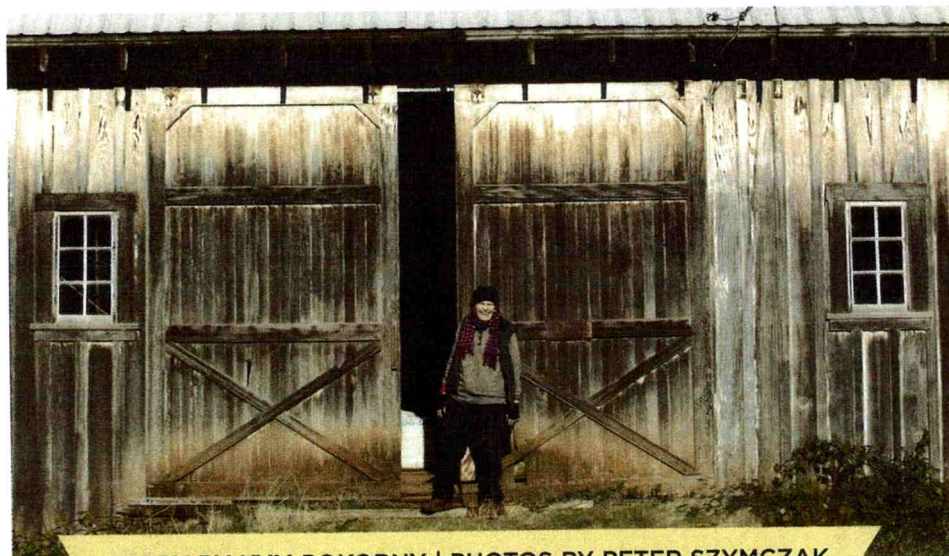




# EVANS FARMS LLC

Cindy Lou Evans Pease, owner of Evans Farms LLC, stands in front of the barn designed by her father, Eldon Evans, when he was just 17 years old.



STORY BY KYM POKORNY | PHOTOS BY PETER SZYMCAK

**I**N 1857, A DETERMINED immigrant from Germany found his way to the lush land around Oregon City. Every day, Christian Frederick Vonderahe walked out of the settlement into the surrounding country looking for the perfect piece of land.

Eventually, he bought 450 acres blessed with good soil, slopes, some timber and, best of all, an abundance of water. Vonderahe knew a good piece of land when he saw it and bought the property from an Oregon homesteader. Cindy Lou Evans Pease, great-great-granddaughter and current owner of Evans Farms, loves the story of Vonderahe's perilous journey to Oregon.

Wanting to go west, Vonderahe threw his hat in with a wagon train. But after a disagreement on the prairie, he left Kansas in the middle of the night determined to walk to Oregon. To fend off potential trouble, he wore a derby hat and carried

a small suitcase; as he walked, he talked to himself. People were convinced he was crazy and Vonderahe made it safely to Oregon — before the wagon train arrived. Pease said his success says a lot about the family that now stretches seven generations. Determination runs in their blood.

“Granny Louise instilled in me that you can do whatever it is in your life that you want to do,” Pease said. “I was raised that way. My parents were raised that way. My boys were raised that way. My grandchildren have been raised that way. It’s all about common sense, values and working hard.”

Pease uses her common sense to run Evans Farms, a 320-acre family nursery and farm just south of Oregon City where it still feels bucolic though development advances. Surrounded by her timber-studded land, Pease drives by the field-grown conifers and talks about fall planting.

“The reason we plant in fall is two-

fold,” said Pease, who is fluent in Spanish, a handy skill for communicating with her crew. “I think plants in Oregon that are fall-planted don’t necessarily push new growth but push root development and then in spring they’re ready to go.”

Years ago, when Pease had to plant every inch of land to pay the mortgage, she planted in spring, too, but it’s more expensive. In fall there’s less reason to irrigate, so money is saved on labor and power. On average, she said, she can finish her crop before those who plant in spring.

Everything grown on the nursery and farm is sold wholesale, as well as to the public, from the living Christmas trees that people come back for year after year to the *Chamaecyparis* in the field. It’s been that way since 1857 when great-great-grandfather Vonderahe planted an orchard of apples and eventually became known as the Cider King of Clackamas County.

“It’s just our rule,” Pease said. “It’s



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#### PEOPLE

Marcelino Perez, farm manager; Betty Florcke, garden center manager; Mario Martinez, container growing manager.

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## EVANS FARMS LLC

our family tradition. If we have Christmas trees, we sell Christmas trees to the public. If we have hazelnuts, we sell hazelnuts. The public is allowed to buy anything the farm grows. It's difficult. It's a seven-day-a-week job."

The best-selling Evans Farms plants in the Pacific Northwest are laurels, especially Portuguese laurel (*Prunus lusitanica*). Grafted ornamentals go east, where Evans Farms' plants are known for their survivability, Pease said.

All cuttings are done outside with heat and mist and hand planted into 4-inch-deep containers and then planted in the field. With B&B plants, they do a series of root prunes, which makes them more resilient. If the plants are rooted out of the ball at the time of shipment, they put new burlap on them. The job of grafting conifers is done in winter and planted out in fall.

"Since dad (Eldon Evans) started with rooted propagation, we have field-selected the stock," Pease said. "We don't take cuttings or scion off junk plants just because you need to make 1,000 cuttings. We take off the best plants, so genetically the field stock gradually becomes better and better. Our cutting stock is pretty darn good. The Portuguese laurel doesn't need much shearing. It's just perfect. It's fat and perfect. Then we know wherever that plant is going, it's going to survive. If it's not good quality — and that means right down to its roots — we don't sell it."

Evans Farms has a reputation for quality locally, too, said Pease, who sells direct to garden centers, re-wholesalers and landscapers. There are no outside sales representatives and no brokers.

"My dad said, 'If you can't sell it, don't grow it,'" Pease said, "and that means you personally have to sell it. Since you have to sell whatever you're growing, you'd better like it. What's the point of having all these cute little plants if you don't sell them? If I'm selling it well, I like it."

One plant Pease loves to sell — her sentimental favorite — is *Sequoia gigantea* 'Hazel Smith', a plant given to her by its namesake when the woman was 96 and

still running a little nursery in her East Coast backyard. Now, Pease has several huge 'Hazel Smith' planted at the nursery, all from the original plant.

"I was so pleased when she gave it to me," she said of the memory. "Her husband was a sea captain and he brought it home from somewhere."

Conifers top Pease's preferred group of plants. She is a long-standing member of the American Conifer Society and served on the board for 10 years, including a stint as national president. Members

call themselves "coneheads" and value conifers for their structure as backbone to the garden.

It's obvious Pease loves her land. Conservation of both the environment and her family legacy loom large for her. Evans Farms recycles all their water onsite and they put in solar panels years ago. Brothers Josh and Jeremy Pease, Cindy Lou's sons, thought solar would be a good idea. Josh wrote a grant, got funds and sold energy credits to put in a system engineered to power three shops, a green-





house, two houses and the pipe irrigation well. The power bill for the nursery dropped from about \$20,000 annually to nothing for six years. Some of the original panels need replacement now, but solar still offsets a large part of the power bill. It's more than paid for itself, Pease said.

Conservation efforts have succeeded so well, Pease sees red hawks nesting at the edge of the woodland. When her dad, Eldon Evans, found out DDT softened their eggs, he never used it again. Slowly they came back and are nesting in the timber. >>

(Left) Everything at Evans Farms LLC is sold wholesale and to the public, from living Christmas trees to the field-grown *Chamaecyparis*.

(Below) Cindy Lou Evans Pease hauls a roll of burlap to a site on her farm where plants are being dug out by hand and dressed with new burlap before shipment.




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**EVANS FARMS LLC**

Cindy Lou Evans Pease, owner of Evans Farms LLC, with garden center manager Betty Floricke.

Before her beloved blue healer, Sequoia, died, Pease would watch from a tractor as one of the hawks circled above Sequoia until she flushed out some game and then swooped down and snatched it up.

“That dog turned around and went, ‘Did you see that?’” she continued, loving the telling of a good story. “That son-of-a-gun hawk just stole my rabbit, and I did all the work!” Sequoia laid down and probably thought, ‘Man, I wish I could climb a tree and get my rabbit back.’ It got to the point where that hawk would show up the minute we came out here and would start circling, waiting for her to flush the game.”

Pease is not a top-down type of boss. She’s out there every day working alongside her longtime partner Marcelino Pérez and her crew. As with all nurseries, the lack of labor holds her back. The younger

generations don’t want to do physical labor and there aren’t enough employees who want to do this type of work.

“Labor is an extremely difficult thing,” she said. “I don’t know what the resolution will be because the bureaucrats are continually making things more restrictive.”

Pease ploughs ahead, literally and figuratively. With her pitching in, Evans Farms is a thriving business. But it’s time to think about succession. She has a bucket list that involves a lot of travel, especially to Spain where she spent a year while in school. But like her dad before her, she’s struggling at letting go.

“I could probably retire, but I’m in good health,” Pease said. “I enjoy what I do. I work too hard because of the labor problem, but I have no intention of retiring soon. My goal is to find the right person that is interested in learning how

to run their own nursery and maybe find someone who wants to take it over.”

Her sons would be the first option, but maybe it will be her granddaughter Lucy. Pease’s granddaughter would be the seventh generation to run Evans Farms and could carry on the family legacy. Once a week, she gets off the school bus to spend time running around with grandma. That means work, but she loves it, Pease said.

**In the beginning**

Pease, who was shocked and happy to be presented with lifetime membership in the OAN in 2018, has been figuring it out her whole life. She was the first of her immediate family to graduate from college with a master’s degree in education and another in Spanish, both from Lewis & Clark College. She has traveled the world, teaches Spanish, was a Clackamas County Planning Commissioner, and has headed up the nursery for 37 years.

Really, though, she worked at the nursery her whole life. When she was a little girl, 8 or 9 years old, the nursery had a U-dig shrub operation. It was Evans Farms’ first foray into nursery stock. There was a box at the end of the driveway and every day she would walk down to collect the money left on the honor system. Pease discovered a passion for horticulture and slowly the plant stand morphed into a garden center when the old repair shop and chicken coop were transformed in 1982.

When Pease took over the nursery from her dad, it wasn’t an easy proposition to get her father, who she inherited her stubbornness from, to hand over the reins.

“It got to the point where dad had to slow down,” Pease said. “Once he cut himself with a chainsaw while cleaning up the woodland that he had logged and replanted. He didn’t have his phone on him but somehow he got to his truck. He was 87.”

Evans finally acquiesced. In 1985, he sold 140 acres to Pease, bringing her that much closer to acquiring as much of the original 450 as possible. In later years she

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was able to acquire 180 acres of the original farm, bringing it to 320.

“What I’ve tried to do is to make sure I’ve made the provisions so that whoever is going to or has interest in running the existing business or establishing a new business on the property has the ability to do so. I’ve made provisions that it can’t be split up. The boys feel that way, too.”

In a recent conversation with Josh, he told her what she wanted to hear. It made her happy for days when he said, “Mom,

you know we will see that the farm is never, never developed. You have to know we will see that never happens.”

### The present and beyond

Pease made arrangements in her trust that the land remain as one. Her sons, Josh and Jeremy, will have the option of continuing the nursery and farm or starting a new business that would fit the land — like a campground, horse complex or outdoor event space. ➤

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"It will remain intact, all 320 acres of this heritage farm," Pease said. "We're a century farm, 165 years old, and still in the same family. It's ready for our next go-round and both boys feel strongly about the land. I take my philosophy from the prior generations, like my father. He always said you have to allow the ability to change, to diversify, to do whatever you have to do to hang on without selling family land. That's the hardest thing to do: To diversify and do what you love to do and make enough money to keep it intact."

Helping with the success of the nursery is the garden center, which began in a remodeled barn in 1982. Betty Florcke, garden center manager, has worked there since 1988.

"I like it here," Florcke said. "I like Cindy. She's nice, very honest and forth-

coming. That makes a difference. And I like that it's a family nursery, a family that has roots here. There's some history. It's a really nice family and they treat you right."

Rod Park, owner of Park's Nursery in Gresham, Oregon, thinks so, too.

"She's a strong, smart, wonderful woman that I've always looked up to," Park said. "There's no one more down to earth than Cindy. She was my member-at-large on the OAN executive board when I was president. She tells it like it is. She isn't afraid."

Park doesn't remember exactly when he met Pease but said it must have been at an Oregon Association of Nurseries Retail Chapter meeting.

"We met at restaurants for OAN meetings, and we sat across the table from guys like J. Frank Schmidt, Jean Iseli, Ted Van Veen, Jack Long, Norbert

Kinen," Park said. "They were plantsmen; they just loved plants and learning how to grow and propagate. We learned a lot from them."

When Norbert Kinen, past OAN president, established a new award for political awareness, Pease was the first to receive it.

"Honestly, I am most proud of that award of any I've received," she said. "[Kinen] saw the long-range implications for me to be on that planning committee."


Pease considers those intrepid nurserymen — as well as Park and Jack Bigej, owner of Al's Garden & Home — as mentors in her early years at the helm of the nursery. She adds to that list her father, who taught her common sense and values, characteristics handed down through the hard-working family. ☺

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