



Three generations share forest life

By SARA GRADY

Five miles east of Fort St. James, three generations of the Helweg family enjoy a special kind of forest life. For 15 years, John and Joyce Helweg have managed a 600-hectare woodlot. The operation has, over the years, not only provided jobs for the family. It's also provided a unique refuge for their young grandchildren.

Three of Joyce's eight grandkids have been presented with serious health issues. Steven, now 19-years old, was diagnosed at birth with PKU, a rare metabolic disorder that requires constant management. His cousin, Daniel, now 10, had surgery, radiation and chemotherapy to treat a Wilms Tumor when he was just six. And Daniel's little brother Drew is living with Juvenile Diabetes, which was diagnosed when he was three.

All of these conditions have required constant commuting to hospitals in Vancouver and Prince George, but the kids can always look forward to returning to their forest playground.

Over the years, John and Joyce's family has helped out on the woodlot. Their son-in-law Chad, a forestry technician, has done skidding, conducted inventories and block layout; son-in-law Doug, a logger at one time, helped with processing timber. At present, work is scarce on the woodlot, but the opportunities for the grandkids are still abundant.

A network of trails thread throughout the area, which are ideal for dirt biking, horse-back riding and snowmobiling. Years ago, Steven built an elaborate motocross track using his dad's bobcat. A cautious child by nature, he took up racing, overcoming the



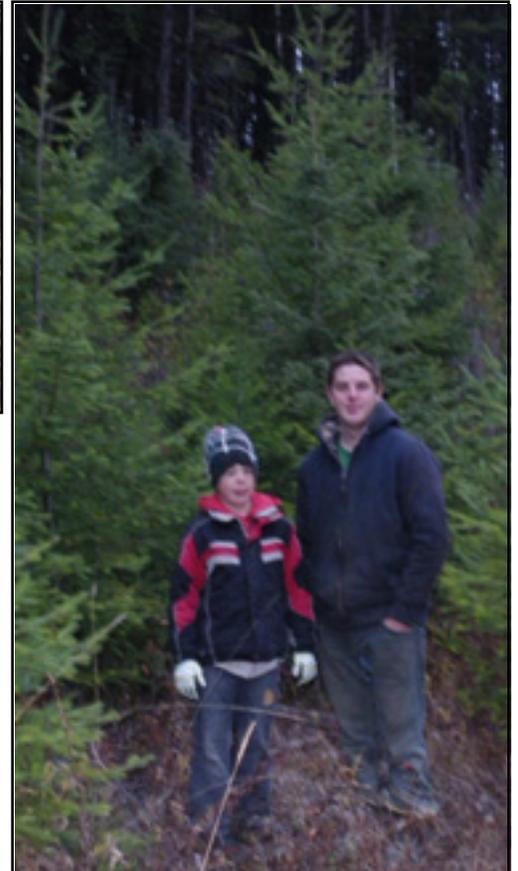
These boys don't grow like weeds — they grow like trees. Steven King and Daniel Lantz help plant trees in the family woodlot, overseen by Grandpa John in 2005 (above). A mere six years later in 2011, boys and trees have all grown considerably (right). Woodlots provide an environment for work, play, education and family fun for three generations of the Helweg family of Fort St. James.

fear that often grips PKU patients.

Daniel, whose resilience was obvious when he climbed on a bike just 12 days after having his major surgery, has developed a love of hunting. He and his grandfather hunt moose, bears and grouse and set snares for rabbits in the forest.

The kids enjoy the winter bonfires and skating parties on their little lake. But it's not all fun and games in the forest. Joyce makes sure the kids learn as they go on their various adventures. A Christmas tree hunt turns into an education on woodlot terms like "free-to-grow," species identification and forest health.

These sessions certainly aren't as intense as the ones she's conducted for UNBC forestry students on forest interface issues — the Helweg's also have an 800-acre ranch and use the woodlot for grazing cattle — but the chil-



dren are learning about the value of this natural resource and gaining greater understanding as they grow up.

Joyce is a strong believer in education as an essential ingredient to the health of the forestry sector, and in the connection between healthy forests and healthy humans. She's hopeful that the teaching and hands-on learning she provides — to students and grandchildren alike — will help ensure the continued health and growth of the forests and the forest industry.

With three generations immersed in forest life, it seems that, at least within this family, the future of forestry is in good hands.

Woodlot advocate honoured with award

The Woodlot program, by its nature, is an exercise in stewardship. Licensees are charged with managing a Crown resource that reaps financial benefits not only for themselves, but for all British Columbians. When these unique forest stewards demonstrate an exceptional commitment to their mandate they are recognized with the Minister's Award of Excellence for Woodlot Management.

This year's Northern BC recipient, Mark Churchill, epitomizes the spirit of the program, both through his efforts in Vanderhoof-based Woodlot 1422, and his tireless work to improve the program for participants across the province.

Eight years ago, Mark sat in a Woodlot Association meeting with his peers as they looked to a future marred by the Mountain Pine Beetle. The woodlots in his region were the first to be decimated by the infestation, and plans had to be made for the changing landscape.

Harvest levels would spike as hectares of dead-standing pine were logged out and so too would income, however briefly. The forests would have to be replanted to fulfill woodlot obligations, but taxation laws only allowed expenses to be carried back against profits for three years, not nearly enough for an industry that operates on such a long cycle in the first place, and that had been interrupted by such an extreme and unusual natural occurrence.

Mark's solution: a 'silviculture RRSP'. After years of lobbying, the support of local MPs, and a serendipitous advocate in the Bloc Quebecois, federal taxation laws are finally undergoing a radical change that will allow woodlot owners to park their profits in a sort of tax-free savings account from which they can draw in the distant future to finance planting obligations.

Unfortunately, this change won't benefit Mark, but he felt it was important to press for the amendments to ensure the future success of the program and his fellow foresters.

Similarly, he's advocated for change to the private-land policy for woodlot licensees, making it easier for landowners to remove sections of their private property from the woodlot license, allowing owners to seek alternate sources of income from the land while it recovers from the pine beetle devastation or other setbacks, both natural and man-made.

While Mark strives to improve the woodlot program for his provincial counterparts, he also works hard to maintain the Water Lily Lake trails in his woodlot. This scenic maze of woodland paths attracts hikers, cyclists and cross-country skiers, giving visitors a chance to



Mark Churchill received this year's Minister's Award of Excellence for Woodlot Management for the work he has done to improve the woodlot program for everyone in the province.

explore various ecosystems, including meadows, lakes, wetland swamps, and rock bluffs, as well as stands of Aspen and sparse Spruce and Lodgepole Pine.

The Mountain Pine Beetle has radically changed the landscape in the north, but with his continued efforts to reforest, and his generous mentorship within the woodlot program, the forest has a truly strong advocate in Mark. His contributions will make an impact for generations to come.



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