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Family's trees hold special memories

■ Milestones marked by plantings over the years

By KAREN AUCHTERLONIE
Of The Oakland Press

At first glance, it might appear that Todd and Jean Rachel have an affinity for planting specialty trees.

A closer look, however, reveals that they're more than just trees — they're memories.

"We always thought it'd be nice to honor major events in our lifetime," Todd said. "This seemed kind of permanent

— better than flowers or something else."

The Rachels have been planting trees in their Orion Township yard since 1990, one year after moving into their home. It started with a tree to commemorate the marriage of one of their sons and the high school graduation of a daughter.

"After about four years of planting trees, Todd said, 'We're going to forget what these trees are about,'" Jean Rachel said.

After a little research, they found a Rochester-based business that creates engraved,

PLEASE SEE TREES/A-7



Todd Rachel is surrounded by his grandchildren near a small tree his family will plant today celebrating his 70th birthday. The family has planted trees to commemorate special events, such as births, graduations, weddings and birthdays. The grandchildren are (from left) Joelle Reich, Logan Rachel, Emma Reich, Benjamin Rachel, Savannah Rachel, and Skylah Rachel holding Darch Rachel.

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stainless-steel tags made specifically to mark trees.

"Each tree we plant, we write the year, type of tree and what the honor is," Jean said. "All in all, we have 14 trees and a plaque for each one."

Since the first tree was planted, the family — Todd and Jean, plus their two sons and a daughter — has passed many milestones and grown substantially.

The children have earned several college degrees, ranging from bachelor's to master's and even a doctorate. The kids have married and a couple have moved out of state. The accomplishments, as well as both Todd and Jean's retirement, are marked by trees wearing the special tags.

Today, Todd will celebrate his 70th birthday.

"We're going to have a party with all the family coming back here, from Minnesota, Chicago and Grand Blanc and plant a tree here in honor of me still being alive," Todd said jokingly.

Each of the family's children is bringing a handful of dirt from their homes that will be used to plant a Frontier Elm, and the grandchildren are looking forward to seeing the trees that were planted in their honor.

"Every child always knows where their tree is and every time they come here I take a picture," Jean said.

A different tree has been used for each occasion, resulting in the Rachels having a wide-ranging collection of trees on their two-acre parcel. They have common trees, like a red maple, dogwood, crabapple, ash, peach and others, as well as some more rare types, like a thundercloud plum, Korean lilac and honey locust.

"My favorite is probably the spiral oak, which I've never



Above, Todd Rachel (second from left) opens a small wrapped plaque, shown at left, that he will put on the small tree behind him to commemorate his 70th birthday. Watching is his wife, Jean, (left) and some of his grandchildren.

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BAUMAN

seen before. It's not very big yet, but it looks pretty cool — it's tall and narrow as opposed to most oaks," Todd said.

The tree tags, called Tree Hug-gers, are 2 inches tall and 6 inches wide. They're attached to the tree with a tension spring, which opens with the tree as it grows.

"It really lends itself to lasting a lifetime in a really safe and gentle manner for the tree," said Ann Mayle, owner of the tree tag business, called A Family Tree.

Mayle has been in business for 10 years and finds that most

of her customers order tags to memorialize loved ones, which is the same reason that prompted her to start the business.

"I had friends who I lost in a car accident and the whole thing with teddy bear and crosses on the roadside memorials just didn't seem fitting, so I started sketching," Mayle said.

Reading some of the engraving orders that come in can be both difficult and uplifting, Mayle said.

"We just got an engraving in that is so pretty. It reads, 'A

memory is a garden where yesterday continues to blossom and love continues to grow. We will miss you,'" Mayle said.

The large number of memorials she handles makes the Rachels' orders all the more special, Mayle said.

"Here is a family who has planted all these trees and they're all for wonderful life events," Mayle said. "It's a great living legacy."

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