



LIFE & STYLE

Christmas trees a family tradition

TOM HUNT Last updated 05:00 03/12/2011

KENT BLECHYNDEN/ Fairfax Media

2011: Mike Regan, Toby Regan and Toby's son, Casper, 6, continue the tradition of buying their tree in Aro Valley.

The beaten-up Morris Oxford has gone to the wreckers and the school has closed, but the Regan family are proof Aro Valley has not changed much since 1976 – at least when Christmas rolls around.

Mike Regan was 33 when The Evening Post took a photo of him and his son Toby – then six – selling Christmas trees in "the bunker" behind the Aro Valley Community Centre to raise money for Matauranga School, since long gone.

Toby Regan, now 41, will be back this year – 35 years later – selling Christmas trees with his son Casper Riskov, who is not the same age his father was when he appeared in The Evening Post.

Mike Regan remembers the old photo well and the story behind it.

A friend of a friend was chopping down small pines at Taupo and the idea was hatched to bring them to Wellington as Christmas trees to raise money for Matauranga.

It was before live Christmas trees had taken off in the capital.

"They arrived at the railway station in a big goods wagon and that was the first of it ... it's been going every year since.

"It just got bigger and bigger."

The 1976 order was about 250 trees. This year the community centre will be selling more than 1000, with proceeds split between Te Aro School, Aro Valley preschool and the community centre.

Mike Regan, who was principal of the alternative Matauranga School, stopped selling trees when the school closed in the early 1980s.

Son Toby was at the school until he was 11, shortly before its closure.

He said the painting on the old car – visible in the old photo – never came off.

His father's beard, however, did, when Toby accidentally clipped it too close.

"The beard and the hair got shorter and shorter," Mike Regan recalled.

Casper is a year 2 pupil at Te Aro School, just up the hill from Aro Park – where Matauranga used to be. He will be selling trees at the community centre with his family just before Christmas.

Christmas tree sale co-ordinator Lexi Goodman has a son at the preschool and a daughter at Te Aro. She said the annual sale was a great way to get to know the community.

"It's really cool to meet other people ... what better to do in the summer than sit and sell Christmas trees?"

This year volunteers selling trees would include Mayor Celia Wade-Brown and Wellington Central MP Grant Robertson. Mr Robertson will be there tomorrow morning, and Ms Wade-Brown is yet to confirm a date.

Trees would be sold from 2pm till 7pm on weekdays and 10am till 7pm on weekends until Christmas Eve. A mulching service is being offered in February, meaning people can take the remains of their tree home to scatter on the garden.

- The Dominion Post