

Prices go up in smoke

Higher costs chip away firewood business

The romance of watching well-seasoned logs softly surrounded by flames in a fireplace has met the harsh reality of rising prices.

Jumps in the cost of labor, transportation and fuel are chipping away at the firewood business, according to local suppliers.

Wholesale prices for oak, ash, maple, hickory and walnut logs increased by 20 per cent within the last year for the Hacker family which has been selling firewood in Farmington since 1946.

In response to the wholesale price increase, the family raised their prices by 10 per cent, according to Julie Hacker.

A hardwood cord measuring four feet by eight feet, called a face cord costs \$44 from the Hackers. White birch with white bark is sold for \$54. A mixed cord of soft wood, such as birch and hardwoods which measure about four feet by eight feet costs \$50, according to Mrs. Hacker.

While the Hackers cope with rising prices, Keith Stone, of Livonia who operates the Green Mountain Tree Service faces the same problems.

"Prices have doubled. But I haven't increased my prices yet because it would be too hard for people to buy wood," he said.

"I try to keep it down, but the price of labor goes up, the price of gas goes up and the cost of equipment is rising," he said.

SEVEN YEARS AGO," when he started his own business in Livonia, Stone paid his employees \$2.50 an hour. Today, he pays four employees \$6 an hour. Usually, he employs six persons.

The price of transportation, the heart of the business, also rises each year. Four-wheel drive trucks have increased in the past five years from a market value of about \$4,000 to \$10,000, according to the suppliers.

Transportation is important to the suppliers who deliver their wood to customers. Each relies on a newspaper ad with a telephone number instead of a road side stand to draw business.

Transportation doesn't begin after the customer buys the logs. That's the end of the journey for the suppliers and their wares. Transporting the logs begins when the suppliers buy them wholesale from a grower. Then they are transported to the supplier.

If the supplier cuts his own logs, he faces the problems and costs of transporting them back to his business. All this maneuvering of logs requires gas

and adds to the wear and tear of vehicles.

"We bought a truck about a year ago and in a few years we'll have to buy another," said Mrs. Hacker.

ALTHOUGH THE HACKERS AND STONE operate their businesses year round, their customers don't start thinking about buying fireplaces until after Labor Day.

That's when steady customers call to order a winter's worth of wood.

But some customers don't think about their fireplaces until the cold weather.

Business speeds up after ice storms and during the first cold days. By January, business begins to slow for the suppliers.

A good business day for the Hackers involves the selling of between 25-30 face cords of wood. Stone counts 10 cords a day as a brisk business.

But as business costs rise, competition also increases.

"Everybody and his brother has a pick-up and a chain saw," Stone said.

To offset more competition, demand is increasing as more homeowners decide to add fireplaces, according to Robert Yurk, of Farmington who works for a brick mason and operates a firewood supply business in his off-time.

Yurk, who has sold firewood for four years, sees the increased demand as another factor in rising prices. With more demand, suppliers travel farther to cut down suitable trees, he said.

YURK, who cuts his own wood sells it in smaller bundles than the Hackers and Stone.

In addition to the common problem of jockeying around rising costs, there is a variety of opinion in the business concerning the best and most economi-

cal type of trees to purchase for firewood.

White birch with its white bark starts burning fast and crackles in the fireplace, according to the Hackers. At \$54 a face cord it's more expensive than a \$44 face cord of hardwoods which would include ash, maple, oak and walnut.

But for fragrant luxury, there is true-wood. For \$60 a face cord, the wood of a cherry tree can add a sweet smell to a family room.

Elm, at \$30 a face cord for Stone is that supplier's favorite wood.

"It burns hotter, longer. Birch is a waste of money. It burns fast. But it's pretty," he said.



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Obituaries

EVA MITTLER
Mrs. Mittler, 89, died in her Farmington home on Jan. 2.

She was born in Hungary and had been a Farmington resident for many years.

Surviving are: son, Joseph; daughters, Mrs. Ernest Burmeister, Mrs. Steve Radmanovich, Mrs. Roderick McNeil, Mrs. Bruce Trimble and Miss Mary Mittler; 11 grandchildren and 17 great-grandchildren.

A Scripture reading was conducted on Jan. 4 and a requiem high mass was recited on Jan. 5 in St. Gerard's Church with the Rev. Maurice Decker officiating. Burial was at Holy Sepulchre Cemetery of Southfield.

AUGUSTA E. WILKE

Mrs. Wilke, 89, died Jan. 4 in Farmington Hills.

She was a housewife and was born in Detroit. She moved to Farmington Hills two years ago.

Surviving are: son, George A.; daughter, Mrs. Mildred Goetke; sister Mrs. Florence Payke; four grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

Services were conducted at Thayer-Rock Funeral Home and at Grace Lutheran Church, Detroit. Pastor V. Frederick Halboth, Jr., officiated. Burial was at Grand Lawn Cemetery, Detroit.

Life dream fulfilled

(Continued from page 1A)
Farmington Hills. The couple's 22-year-old son, Kevin, will be the fourth generation McCabe to take up that occupation.

Mrs. McCabe hopes their daughter, Katrina, 18, will become the fourth generation of her family to pursue law. Now a senior at Mercy High School, she is working at her mother's firm part-time.

"I'M NOT GOING to push her in that direction. She has to choose a career that will make her happy. But I believe that she will end up in law."

"The work is very challenging. There is no apprenticeship program for new attorneys. You feel your way through the procedures for about a year, until you become comfortable with them."

"Law is difficult work. It's no place for the timid or sensitive person. No

one should enter law with the idea just to make a lot of money. Go into it because you enjoy it and know you can do a good job."

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