

## A MOON TREE?



Maybe it's been to the moon, but you'd never know it. This healthy Douglas-fir is one of the moon seedlings planted across the United States in 1976.

Forestry Extension agents are used to fielding odd requests, but this one had Scott Leavengood stumped. A man in Phoenix, Arizona, named Michael Simon had heard there was a "moon tree" growing somewhere on the grounds of the OSU College of Forestry. Could he get cuttings?

Leavengood, an OSU Forest Products Extension agent in Washington County, asked a few questions. No, said Simon, it was not a tree grown on the moon, but a tree planted from seeds that had orbited the moon in 1971 with astronaut Stuart Roosa of the Apollo 14 team. Simon was trying to get his 16-year-old daughter interested in science, and he thought propagating a moon tree would be a good father-daughter project.

Leavengood did some investigating. Stuart Roosa had

been a smokejumper in his youth, and he and Forest Service officials arranged the seeds' flight to the moon.

Afterward, the seeds were germinated, and in 1975 and 1976 some 450 seedlings were given to state forestry organizations throughout the country to be planted as part of the nation's bicentennial celebration.

Leavengood discovered that one of the moon trees, a Douglas-fir seedling, had been planted on the east lawn of Peavy Hall in 1976. Today the tree is a healthy 40-foot-tall specimen, apparently none the worse for its wanderings as a seed. Leavengood took cuttings and cones from the tree and sent them to Simon.

The project did not have the hoped-for effect on Simon's daughter. "She didn't find moon trees exciting at all," he confesses. But Simon went ahead anyway,

trying unsuccessfully to get the cuttings to root. Now he intends to plant the seeds after conditioning them in the freezer according to Leavengood's instructions.

Leavengood wishes him luck. "Generating a Douglas-fir from a cutting is a very difficult task, even for a horticultural professional," he says. Sprouting a seed is somewhat easier, but it's still tricky. "I'm hoping he'll keep me posted."

*The story of the moon trees, including their present whereabouts, is posted on the NASA web site, [http://nssdc.gsfc.nasa.gov/planetary/lunar/moon\\_tree.html](http://nssdc.gsfc.nasa.gov/planetary/lunar/moon_tree.html)*