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## Local graduate plans to open Christmas tree, blueberry farm

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By Leah Merrill

Elaine Atwood of Chandler isn't an ordinary graduate of Mesa Community College. At 59 years old, the Navy veteran is hoping to apply her two associate degrees in applied sciences to open a Christmas tree and blueberry farm.

"I'm not exactly young, so I picked something that I love, which is Christmas," Atwood said. "The blueberries offer a different season to work."

Atwood was one of the first to graduate from the sustainable agriculture program at MCC, which began last fall. She also received an associate degree in urban horticulture.

When Atwood moved to Arizona from Washington, the local Veterans Affairs office gave her and her husband, Joel, an opportunity to pursue an education, something she had not yet done given her time in the Navy, and then traveling around working and raising a family.

When her young grandson began expressing an interest in working in a business with his grandparents, Atwood's dream began to formulate.

The plan is to purchase land in Prescott for the Christmas tree and blueberry farm and renovate a barn into a recording and rehearsal studio for music, her husband's passion.

"My husband and I are building a business side by side because we wanted something both of us could do so that we could work together, but our interests are in totally different directions," Atwood said.

Eventually, Atwood wants to utilize her farming business and her husband's music business to help give back to the community. She hopes that the giving spirit that comes along with the holiday season can help aspiring musicians and at-risk youth.

"It's not easy, but it's important for the youth to know that nothing in life that is really rewarding is going to be easy," Atwood said.

*(Photo by Mesa Community College)*

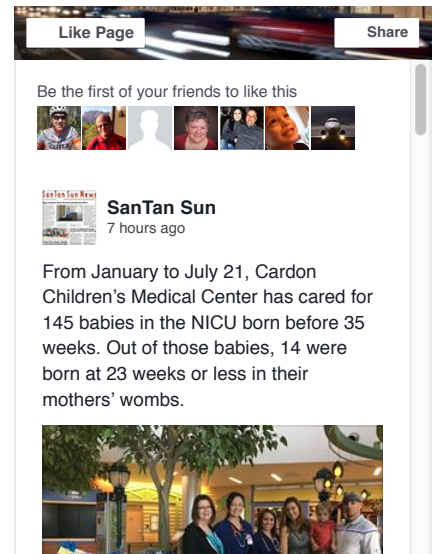
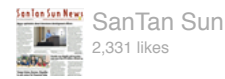
*Elaine Atwood of Chandler earned two associate degrees in applied sciences from Mesa Community College and plans to open a Christmas tree and blueberry farm.*

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