

## Member spotlight



Scott Smith of New Hill, North Carolina, owns [Whispering Pines Farm Sawmill](#) with his wife Laureen. Scott is a proud treecycler -- milling urban wood into usable lumber. His clients include local universities, state agencies and Shelco Construction Company.

### ***How did you enter the business of processing urban wood? Were you a treecycle mill from the start?***

We started treecycling from the beginning. Our first sawmill was a Peterson 10" WPF Swingblade Mill that was purchased in 2006. In 2012, I designed and built my own 72" wide dedicated slabbing sawmill to operate on the Peterson Track. We also have a Baker bandmill.

One of our earliest milling projects was a 54" red oak log that came from the Habitat for Humanity expansion in Pittsboro, NC in 2010. The log was milled into quartersawn lumber with our Peterson WPF swingblade mill. Below are two photos of that first treecycling log -- as it's being milled (left) and after wood processing was completed, yielding two bookmatched 16" wide quartersawn red oak veneer leaves (right).



***You have high profile clients. How did you generate their interest in your services? How do you market yourself overall?***



Most of our marketing is through customer referral and word of mouth. When we started in 2006, nobody else in North Carolina could mill a 72" diameter log or up to 56' long. Our operation has subsequently been featured in several newspapers and magazines, including *Fine Woodworking*, *Sawmill and Woodlot*, *Durham News*, and *Greensboro News and Record*.

We have worked on many major projects, including the new NC DENR Headquarters building in Raleigh, where they treecycled many pecan trees that grew on the location. This was the first LEEDS certified project in Raleigh. We also worked on the adjacent Nature Research Center, where they treecycled the oldest magnolia tree in the City of Raleigh into veneer that was used throughout the building (the tree was dying). Additional woods from that site included red oak and pecan.

Here is some of the magnolia used for cabinetry in a conference room at the facility (left) and a wall made from veneered magnolia panels that were treecycled from the site (right).





One of our more interesting projects was working with Duke University on its new Student Health and Wellness Center. Lumber from trees that grew on the site was processed into veneer, cabinet lumber and benches used in the building. Here is a 20' white oak log bench that we made, which was installed in the building where the tree had previously stood!



In addition to many projects with Duke University, we have treecycled logs for NC State University, UNC Chapel Hill, Meredith College in Raleigh and Elon College in Elon. A few years back we treecycled the oldest oak tree on the UNC - Chapel Hill campus. A ring count dated it back to 1770. We loaded the 20,000 pound log onto our trailer and transported it back to our milling yard in New Hill, NC. We subsequently milled and then kiln dried the lumber from this and other logs from the very old post oak.

***Your lumber is used for building structures. Who grades and certifies your lumber?***

Most of our lumber is not graded. It is intended for non-structural uses where grading is not required, or timberframe structures where a Registered Professional Engineer stamps the prints certifying the use of ungraded timbers. When grading is required, Southern Pine Inspection Bureau has come to our facility and graded our wood.

***What do you consider to be the challenges for inserting high quality urban wood into the marketplace?***

Pricing. Typically, it costs more to process urban wood due to losses from metal, log retrieval costs, etc. You have to be in an area where the market will support the higher cost.

***What parting message do you have for individuals who may want to create their own wood processing business?***

Charge enough for your services! Over the years, we have seen many people enter the wood processing business, and a few years later they get out of it because they couldn't afford to stay in it. Their biggest problem was not charging enough for the services that they were providing.

We base our service fees upon our costs of production, value of our finished product, and market demand for our work.

Also, adopt the philosophy of continual education and self-improvement. I have been drying lumber for 20 years, and milling for 17 years and I still learn new things every day.

**Do you have a business story to share or an urban wood vision for which you need assistance?** Send Kathryn Reis an [email](#) today!