

— P R E S S R E L E A S E —

After the Christmas decorations come down the real adventure begins for *The Greenest Tree*...

*New Orleans author pens heartwarming story that carries the Christmas spirit beyond the holidays
and teaches children the virtues of ‘tree-cycling’*

NEW ORLEANS – For 4 years, readers have been charmed by *The Greenest Tree* — a heartwarming holiday story about a little tree that journeys from the woods to become a beloved family Christmas tree.

The Greenest Tree received the National Gold Medal distinction in the 2016 Independent Publisher Book Awards (the IPPYs). Independent authors and publishers from across the United States entered their books in the 20th annual IPPY book awards contest, which recognizes the excellence in independent publishing. *The Greenest Tree*, published in 2015, took the gold in the popular Holiday category, reinforcing why the book is fast becoming a family reading tradition.

The 45-page hardcover children’s book was written by New Orleans author Tracie Morris Schaefer and beautifully illustrated by New Orleans-based designer and art director Rhett Thiel. The colorful illustrations and text convey the emotions of the main character, a curious young Christmas tree, as he navigates his circle of life and discovers that the magic of a Christmas tree does not end when the holiday is over.

The Greenest Tree is also a teaching tool for parents and teachers to introduce children to the concept of recycling and repurposing objects so they don’t end up in landfills. At the end of the story, there is a cute “tree-cycle” ornament for children to cut out, encouraging them to place one last ornament on their own tree before it gets recycled.

The idea for the book was sparked by a poignant moment between Schaefer and her daughter one January morning as she shuffled her children back to school after the long holiday break. “My daughter waved sadly to our Christmas tree lying on the curb and she said, ‘Goodbye, Christmas tree! You were a good little tree,’” says Schaefer. “I tried to comfort her by explaining that the tree was not being thrown out as trash, but was going to be picked up by a recycling program and used to rebuild our coastal wetlands.”

Later that day, Schaefer searched for a children’s book to further explain the tree recycling process but could not find one. Schaefer, an accomplished and creative professional photographer, says the idea to write a book on the topic churned within her until she was compelled to release the idea on paper.

“I realized that many of us teach our kids to be kind, respect the earth, to not be caught up in commercialism, to remember the reason for the season — only to literally kick our Christmas trees to the curb as garbage. This seemed an obvious contradiction,” Schaefer says. “I also realized that in a holiday steeped in tradition, we offer no closure or continuity to a season that we celebrate so thoroughly. Maybe we don’t need closure but we can continue the spirit throughout the year by recycling our trees for a bigger cause of restoring our wetlands.”

Each year, thousands of fresh-cut Christmas trees remain a part of our communities through recycling programs nationwide. These projects find various uses for the discarded trees so they don’t end up in landfills. In Louisiana they have been used to create shoreline fences, while other trees have been airlifted and strategically dropped into canals and bayous. These trees find new life as they protect our fragile marshes and wetlands from harmful erosion.

The Greenest Tree is available at local bookstores and retailers.