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# Protecting our resources

As nursery people, our livelihoods depend on caring for and protecting our resources, both natural and human. We depend on abundant water, rich soils, and a healthy environment to grow the high-quality plants Oregon growers are known for.

We also require an adequate and knowledgeable workforce to care for our plants and manage our businesses.

Where will our new managers come from? Most nurseries in Oregon are family businesses — small, large, and in between. The managers of these businesses are either individuals from the family that owns the company, or others from outside of family ownership.

Regardless of who they are, we need to ensure that we spend enough time and effort to develop these human resources in the same way we nurture our natural ones.

In my family, the older generation, historically, has always planned that the succeeding generation would step into the management of the family business. That plan has worked well for three generations of our family farm and can continue to work well with adequate structure and controls on succession.

I am apprehensive, however, that the last market cycle may have discouraged some of our young people from pursuing a career in the nursery business. The work can be difficult and frustrating. Our economy offers other careers that may be more financially rewarding and provide a more leisurely lifestyle. To convince this younger generation of the virtues of a nursery career, we need to sell the positive side of the nursery lifestyle.

Being in the nursery business allows us to work outside and grow things. We not only get to beautify our surroundings, but we also get to improve our environment in the process.

The nursery lifestyle also lets us be independent. It enables us to create our own businesses, and to work together with other independent business people with similar values and goals. And histori-

cally, the nursery business allows for a good living, helping us provide for our families and for their futures.

What else can we do to develop this valuable resource? How about considering internships for interested young people? We have employed a customer's son who would like to pursue a nursery career and has the desire to learn more about the trade. This arrangement has been advantageous to both our nursery and the young, aspiring nurseryman.

Many larger nurseries do have internship programs, but all companies regardless of size can benefit from them.

Another way to develop our future nursery people is to participate with and support the horticulture programs provided by our community colleges and universities. These programs are where these future nursery owners and nursery employees acquire some of the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in our industry. Often the desire to come into the nursery business can be ignited in these educational institutions.

Future nursery people need formal learning, plus the practical nursery knowledge that can only be gained on the job. Nurseries can help these programs by supporting extension programs and providing assistance with research. The OAN, its chapters, and its members also help by funding scholarships for horticulture students.

My concern for the future is personal. Although my children have all worked on the nursery and seem to have a hidden passion for it, all three of them are determined to pursue other careers. I believe if you asked, many current nursery people also had such plans but learned that the nursery lifestyle is rich and rewarding.

I am looking forward to letting my children find their way — but I haven't given up on having a future nursery person or two in the mix. ☺



By Mike Coleman  
OAN PRESIDENT