

Don Sprague, owner of Garden Gallery Iron Works, recently introduced a line of elevated planters made of repurposed tin from barns and other locations.

PHOTO BY CURT KIPP



Built by hand

Garden Gallery Iron Works owner Don Sprague believes in giving back to the industry he serves

Garden Gallery Iron Works

Known for: Hand-crafted metal items for the garden, including planters, basket stands, arbors, trellises, benches, tables and more

Founded: 1982 as Don Sprague Sales

Owner: Don Sprague

Address: 2967 Industrial Ave., Hubbard, OR 97032

Phone: 503-981-0297

Web: www.gardengalleryhubbard.com

Email: info@gardengalleryhubbard.com

Farwest Booths: 7019, 8019, 3059, 3061, 4060, 4062

By Curt Kipp

According to Don Sprague, everything is important when it comes to building something successful — whether that something is a business, an organization or even a nation. Every detail, every person, every contribution counts.

It's a lesson he learned as a young lad, growing up on a dairy farm in Wisconsin. During that time, Don heard President John F. Kennedy give a speech that has stayed with him all of his life.

In that speech, the president said that in America, the man who cleans restrooms is just as important as the airline pilot. Everyone matters. Don agreed with the sentiment then, and still does now.

"It's all so very important to make the big picture come together," he said.

As the owner and president of Garden Gallery Iron Works, Don helps the big picture come together for his business. Based in Oregon, the company manufactures metal garden furniture and accessories in a large, 30,000-square-foot space.

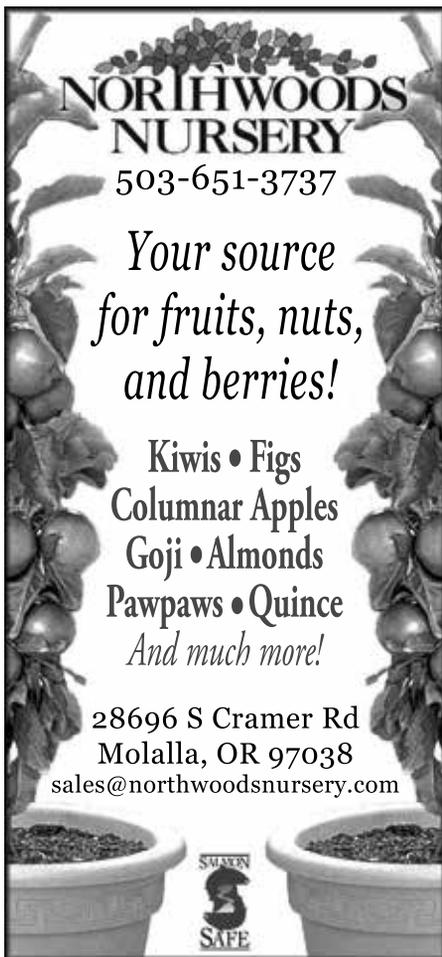
The company's ever-growing lineup of products includes hanging basket stands, arbors ("It's been a crazy year for arbors"), trellises, vertical gardening items, benches and a new line of recycled metal products made of barn tin. These include raised garden beds and planters for the patio and elsewhere. Garden Gallery also offers a city basket program that makes use of Oregon-made Anderson Pots. ▶

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One of Sprague's recent metal creations is a grape planter that directs the branches upward into the shape of a tree. He's also proud of his 20-foot petunia tree, which contains 240 individual pots. PHOTO BY CURT KIPP

In all, the company offers around 1,000 different items for farms, gardens and nurseries. The majority of Don's items have a powder coat finish for durability. The items are shaped by hand, and all are made entirely in the United States — a fact of which he is very proud.

"We make all our metal goods right here in this shop in Oregon," Don said.

Garden Gallery ships to all states, and currently services about 500 accounts with different garden centers. Garden Gallery also has a retail showroom. It was created initially to let wholesale customers see the products in a retail environment, but is open to the public. Naturally, Don makes sure not to undercut his local wholesale customers on price, and will often steer business to them.

The company employs 15, and Don is quick to credit the employees for the company's success. They are personally

invested in what Garden Gallery is doing, he said, and that makes a big difference.

Very involved in the Farwest Show

Since joining the Oregon Association of Nurseries in 1997, Don has stayed very active in the association. He has served on the Farwest Show Committee for most of the last 18 years and has seen the changes.

He believes the show is moving in a positive direction. He especially liked last year's show and is looking forward to this year's show, which he expects will be much improved even from that.

This year's visitors will not have too much trouble finding Don — or his products — out on the expo floor. He occupies several booth spaces, including two islands, and that's because he believes in the value of Farwest.

"Today, it's absolutely the most incredible show going," he said.

Farwest is best known for its green goods. That's only natural, given Oregon's ideal growing climate, the number of growers located in the state, and the quality of the plants they produce. It also helps that the show is held in August, an ideal time to see the nurseries and an ideal time to secure plant supplies for the next spring season.

However, the show is making a strong effort to attract hard good exhibitors and buyers. That's because, according to Don, garden center buyers need both green and hard goods in order to satisfy today's customers and turn a profit.

"The day of any garden center being solely focused on green goods — those days are gone," Don said. "You need a variety of items to attract people to your store. It's about more than just plant material."

Don has often urged the show committee to move in this direction. "It's always been my suggestion," he said. "If we've got a strong green goods show and a strong hard goods show, it can't go wrong."

The pathway to success

The pathway to Don's current success has been a long one, but a spirit of entrepreneurship has been the overriding theme.

After graduating high school, he voluntarily enlisted in the United States Air Force. His service included one tour of duty in Vietnam.

Upon completing his service, he married his high school sweetheart, Eileen. He went to work for Sportsman Airpark in Newberg, Oregon, where he earned an aircraft maintenance license and a pilot's license. Later, he became an independent representative for a Piper Aircraft distributor serving the Northwest.

"I found out what the world of self-employment is all about," he said. "There are better ways to go, but it's been a challenge and I've enjoyed it."

In 1982, he started Don Sprague Sales. The company started out distributing farm and garden products to retailers. Don worked with a large list



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of about 200 manufacturers, including Corry's, Lily Miller and others.

As an outgrowth of this business, he began to manufacture products for the equine market. From there, he added to his repertoire products that garden centers could sell, and that line of products took on the brand of Garden Gallery Iron Works.

Don also owns a separate business called Cinch Traps. The product instantly controls moles and gophers. He believes it to be the only such brand of trap that is still entirely made in the USA.

Don enjoys making a statement with his unique products and projects. He created what he says is the world's largest hanging basket for The Garden Corner, a retailer located in Tualatin, Oregon.

The Garden Gallery manufacturing facility and retail store also boasts the world's largest petunia tree, which is 20 feet tall and accommodates 240 eight-



This planter for cucumbers allows the vines to spread and keeps the cucumbers off the surface below. PHOTO BY CURT KIPP

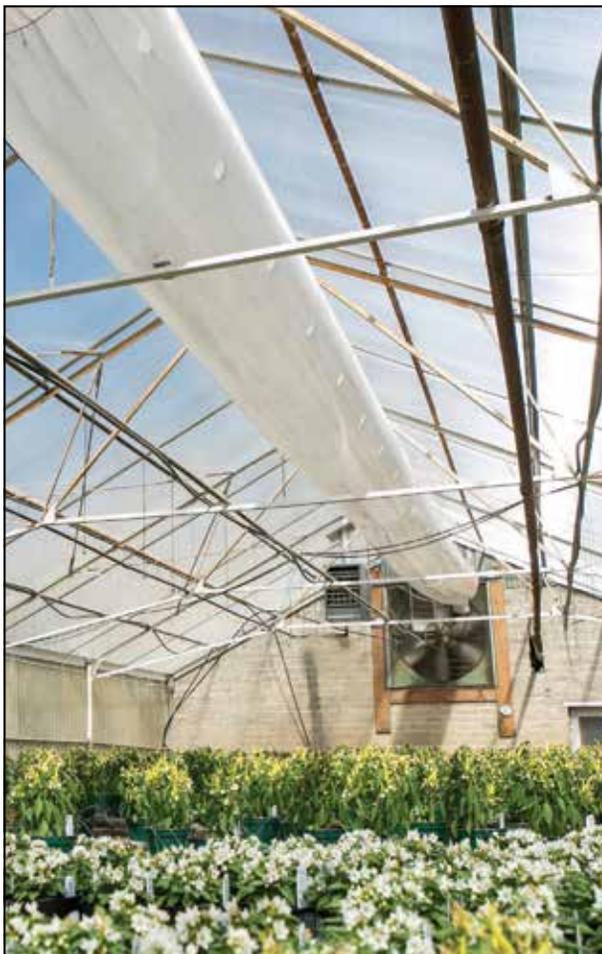
inch pots. It requires regular care but Don considers it worth the effort. "We water and feed it every day," he said.

Throughout all of his efforts, Don continues to be a big believer in giving back to the customers and the industries that he serves.

Experience has shown him the value of such an approach. It's part of why he continues to support the Farwest Show and work for its success. Doing so only creates a better platform for Garden Gallery, as well as other exhibitors.

"I've learned that by meeting people a little more than halfway, it all comes back to you," he said. ☺

Curt Kipp is the director of publications and communications at the Oregon Association of Nurseries and the editor of Digger magazine. Contact him at ckipp@oan.org.



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