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# Our gift is stewardship

In horticulture, we focus a great amount of energy on being good stewards of our land and natural resources. We talk to the public and our elected officials about our vital need for air, water and soil, and how we can sustainably maintain these resources for our use today and into the future.

Our products — living plants — grace our natural and built environments, contributing back to the ecosystem. They clean the air, create habitats, stabilize the soil, provide food and create beauty in the world around us. But our stewardship does not end there. We are also stewards for people we employ, for those in need and for those looking to share in our knowledge.

Each year, our association, member companies and individuals give generously of their time, products, money and knowledge.

At an individual level, we see the greatest variety in giving and caring. Some choose to give their time working in a community or botanical garden. Some share their knowledge and expertise with schoolchildren through opportunities such as Adopt-A-Farmer. Some volunteer to educate high school children on greenhouse and nursery techniques. Others donate money, seeds or plant material to help people grow their own food.

No matter how we approach it, we all give our own free time to help make community events and projects successful.

Our member companies give in very direct ways to their communities. Some examples include donations of products or sponsorship dollars to local school auctions. They help out scout troops, cancer awareness organizations and master gardeners with fundraising. Some companies also donate equipment use for local community gardens, or donate supplies to a Future Farmers of America (FFA) or 4-H group.

As employers, we continue our stewardship to our employees and their families. I have witnessed nurseries helping their employees secure housing or transportation. They celebrate joyous occasions such as births and weddings.

They are there with emotional and sometimes monetary support during times of serious illness or death.

Our member companies give pay advances or help secure loans to assist employees through difficult financial times or to seize opportunities to improve their families' lives. Some nurseries even provide scholarships for employees or their children. All of these things are above and beyond the basic safety, training and benefits employers typically offer. That's impressive, considering that many of our businesses are family owned — we're not talking about huge corporations with vast resources.

At a chapter level, our association sees some of its best community outreach. Chapters directly support the FFA, 4-H clubs and community events such as county fairs and the Oregon Ag Fest. Chapters also give directly through the many holiday parties coming this month. Most of these func-

tions benefit a local food bank or shelter.

As an association we have the Oregon Nurseries Foundation. This foundation helps administer the many scholarships the chapters give, as well as some that have been funded by individuals.

I had the opportunity to meet one of our scholarship recipients, a graduate-level student, at the International Trials Conference held in conjunction with the Farwest Show this year. It is great to see us supporting the next generation of horticulturists.

We also work to craft legislation that supports workers in a way that is economically sustainable. Some examples of this are our support of driver's cards and our work on paid time off.

So as we get ready to close out 2015 — a year that saw real economic improvements for many of our members — let's not forget to maintain our community stewardship. Let's continue to be a truly caring and giving industry. ☺

