

We are better together

Many voices make a strong association. While respect and leadership are not handed out, they are earned and maintained.

The association is a membership organization. It was created to serve as a conduit for research and education, marketing and regulatory protection, and to bring people together. We have a shared fate, regardless of which part of the industry you touch.

Leaders that lead

During our most recent (and very successful) OAN Convention, I was struck by words from our outgoing president Mike Coleman and current president Leigh Geschwill.

Coleman eloquently spoke about how important the association is to the industry. For him, the best metaphor is that the OAN is a “missile-defense system” for all Oregon nurseries — members and non-members alike.

What did he mean by this? Simple.

The industry is constantly being bombarded by proposed legislation and regulations, but the association and its member leaders are critical in dealing with these threats. In fact, we're often able to shape them into opportunities. The OAN earns respect, because time and again we have shown that we are problem solvers.

Geschwill launched her presidency with a call to action. She said she is committed to finding the path forward and getting things done. The result may not be what we anticipated or planned, but it will represent progress. Bottom line? The association won't quit on the membership.

She talked about how Oregon can lead the industry from our Northwest corner of the country. We can shape our future by dealing with workforce issues, water availability, the ease of getting products to market, and improving public perceptions of our industry. She said our members are bright, intelligent and hardworking — and working together, we will succeed.

I could not agree more with our leadership.

What members want for 2016

The OAN was founded in 1933 during a time when our country faced its greatest economic challenges. Growers saw the value of a united front, that there is strength in numbers.

But where are we now? A survey went out to OAN members asking for thoughts and opinions about what the association does and how it can benefit green industry businesses. The results showed that coming out of the Great Recession, our members place importance on networking, marketing and advocacy.

Marketing: The Online Nursery Guide (www.NurseryGuide.com) complements the printed plant directory for our members and connects you with potential customers. In 2015, 397 companies listed 22,721 plants, products and services. Members can add, drop or edit individual listings with a simple click of the mouse. Innovation and ingenuity made NurseryGuide.com one of the first of its kind, but our members and users give it staying power. Over the past year, the site had more than 675,000 pageviews — a jump of 25 percent.

Meanwhile, the Farwest Show was revitalized and brought more attendees in this year for face-to-face interactions between growers and decision makers. Nursery tours bustled during the awesome summer months in Oregon. The association also put together both a wholesale nursery map to connect buyers and sellers, as well as a retail map to reach consumers.

Redesigned and improved *Digger* magazine: This month's issue of *Digger* marks the debut of a redesign that was planned and executed by our OAN Publications team. The new look is cleaner and more contemporary. Design, however, is just one aspect of *Digger*. Content is most important, and the *Digger* staff is working to keep that fresh, as well.

This year, we're placing greater emphasis on the issues growers must confront in today's environment if they want to be successful. We are also introducing a new monthly series on the benefits of plants, giving growers and retailers some excellent talking points and even artwork they can use to market their goods.



Jeff Stone
OAN EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Networking: The OAN Convention cemented the fact for me that our members really get a lot out of interactions and learning from each other. Chapters are another source for this networking. We develop tremendous leaders through our chapter system and through our focused committee structure. However, almost half of those who filled out the survey do not belong to a chapter. Our challenge and opportunity in 2016 is to reinvigorate networking so that it is a benefit to your business as well as a conduit to share industry knowledge to a new generation.

Advocacy: I am proud of the volunteer leaders who shape our effort to protect and promote the industry with elected officials, regulators and other interest groups. The OAN is a place where top political influencers talk in a small setting about issues that impact your business every day.

I am a believer that if you are not at the political table, you are most certainly on the menu. This year we took legislators and state officials on nursery tours up and down the Willamette Valley and in Central Oregon. Nobody tells our story better than the growers themselves, and these tours proved it. Additionally, “road shows” with our legal counsel Jordan Ramis brought practical advice on emerging labor issues, pesticide regulations and challenges to water supply.

I am thankful to be your executive director. I get up every day to work hard for you and spend my time trying to make it easier for you to do what you do so well. As we turn a page to the New Year, let us appreciate what each brings to the association table. I wish you every success during 2016! ☺