

# The promise of spring

**For our nursery industry, the promise of spring is here. Winter trade shows give way to the sights and sounds of bustling workers. Trucks line up at the loading docks to pick up and deliver the quality green goods the Oregon nursery industry grows throughout the year.**

The nursery industry personifies rebirth. The plants we grow are the best evidence when long-awaited spring finally arrives. We are a plant-moving machine.

All year, we grow it. Spring is when we ship it. And when plants begin to ship, it's time for retailers to ramp up what they do, as well. Spring is game time. No days off.

Our calendars tell us the exact day of the vernal equinox, but the real evidence is outside. With our own eyes, we see nature come alive, bringing an end to the cold and rain-soaked winter. We become aware of green buds in the yard and flowers blooming. We discern the hint of warming temperatures. We even sense the extension of light's hold on our daily life.

For the more oblivious, such as myself, awareness of spring is delivered upside the head — via a long honey-do list out in the yard. Our minds turn to thoughts of spring training and a focus on the Cactus and Grapefruit leagues. There's also the first trip down to Autzen Stadium for the University of Oregon spring football game.

On March 17, I also celebrate my 2.28 percent Irish heritage and continue a tradition of hop consumption that has been observed since the late 18th century.

Every four years, spring is the heart of the presidential primary season. Many caucuses and primaries are held in March — well after the mad rush of attention in the bellwether states of Iowa, New Hampshire and South Carolina. In other words, I get called a sports and political

dork by my family during spring. There is some truth in these labels.

## **An industry that is growing again**

Nobody sugarcoats the fact that the Great Recession was the toughest economic time the industry has ever faced.

OAN lost a lot of valued members due to the downturn. Some were large operations and many were smaller, but their absences are felt by friends and competitors alike. Nursery licenses dropped by one-third in Oregon. The industry was on a standing eight count.

But I know one thing: this industry picks itself off the floor. We're tough. Tenacious. Cue the "Rocky" music and training montage.

The USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service has released its 2014 Census of Horticultural Specialties, which was the first taken since 2009. The news contained therein is very reassuring. Topline figures show that U.S. growers sold \$13.8 billion in horticultural specialty crops in 2014, up from \$11.7 billion in 2009 and \$10.6 billion in 1998.

The numbers placed Oregon as the number three state in the country for sales of horticultural specialty crops, with \$932 million, behind California (\$2.9 billion) and Florida (\$1.8 billion), ahead of Michigan (\$645 million), Texas (\$594 million), North Carolina (\$571 million), Ohio (\$392 million), Arizona (\$388 million), Washington (\$366 million) and New Jersey (\$355 million).

The industry's improved numbers — both regionally and nationally — prove we can take a big hit and keep going.

Within the broad category of horticultural specialty crops, nursery stock was Oregon's strongest sector with \$484 million in sales, good for third in the nation behind California and Florida. Other areas of strength included Christmas trees (\$126 million, 1st); annual bedding and garden plants (\$80 million, 11th); propagative horticultural materials, bareroot and unfinished plants (\$71 million, 4th); vegetable seeds (\$25 million, 2nd) and "other" (\$32 million).

Oregon growers were tops in the



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nation in coniferous evergreens (\$129 million), deciduous shade trees (\$114 million) and deciduous flowering trees (\$50 million).

The diversity of what Oregon growers produce plus the specter of shortages in the marketplace lends itself to continued growth, despite all the challenges in labor and transportation.

The promise of economic growth is akin to spring — every year provides a fresh start and a time for new growth.

## **No spring skips its turn**

Author and naturalist Hal Borland said, "No winter lasts forever; no spring skips its turn."

This particular presidential campaign does not resemble a typical spring baseball game in Arizona or Florida. Usually, you have cagey strategy, pitch counts and signs to advance and score runs to win.

But in this campaign — no matter who you root for — there are no gloves, no bases and not even a ball. Just baseball bats in the middle of a field with the participants swinging away.

This kind of winter will also give way to spring. Our nation will have its opportunity to select how our nation grows and who will be our leader.

Our economic spring has begun to bloom. There may be some storm clouds on the horizon — challenges of water, labor, transportation, taxation and regulation. But no matter what weather comes, we can still count on the nursery and greenhouse industry's resiliency.

Just like the promise of spring. ☺