

# Lisa Barnett

**R**EACHING SALES milestones is important to Lisa Barnett, a retail sales professional for nearly 20 years. But to achieve those goals, Barnett has found that creating a cheery environment for customers as well as co-workers must come first.

“People don’t go to nurseries mad or show up to buy plants in a bad mood,” she said. “I’m the one who tries to keep everybody happy all day — that’s just who I am.”

Bubbly by nature, Barnett’s positive attitude hasn’t gone unnoticed. Her co-workers at Wilco presented her with the 2015 Best Customer Service Award. “I really appreciated that. I always try to make sure everybody loves what they do,” Barnett said. “Whether they’re standing at the cash register or back in receiving, everyone is needed.”

Barnett’s exuberance belies the hard-scrabble career she has built for herself and her family. Over the past 17 years, she has worked for a variety of nursery operations while raising two children. She also serves as secretary and board representative for the OAN’s Retail Chapter.

**What’s your guiding principle?** To provide the best customer service I can. That’s number one for me. It’s how you retain your customers. They know your name, and you know theirs. I go to work every day to make sure my customers are getting everything they need.

The only reason I have a job is because customers show



**AGE** 43  
**HOME** Salem, Oregon  
**WORK** Sebright Gardens, retail salesperson / Wilco Farm Store (Silverton), lawn and garden specialist  
**OAN** Board Representative / Secretary, OAN Retail Chapter  
**CONTACT** lbcountrychick@yahoo.com

up to see what I’ve brought in and to talk about what their problems are and how we can solve them. Without them, I have no job. I’m thankful every day that people want plants and are excited about what I have to offer.

**How did you first get into the industry?** It was 1998. I’d been working for a bank for three years. I hated being stuck in an office. I did credit card collections and felt bad every day, because people couldn’t make their payments.

One day I told my parents, “You know what? I really want to work at this nursery.” I had seen an ad in the newspaper for a job at a retail nursery. So

I went to work for Midway Plant Farms, a full-scale nursery in Hillsboro.

**You had no previous nursery experience?** None whatsoever. I had just gotten my first house and started working in the garden, redoing the yard. I said to myself, “I love this!”

I worked at Midway for six months, starting as a cashier and ending as hard goods manager. I absorbed as much as I could. I asked every employee, “What is that? What is that?” I fell in love with the plants and making people happy.

When they shut down, I went back to school, took plant identification classes at Portland Community College’s Rock

## MEET THE LEADER


Interview and photo by Peter Szymczak

Creek Campus, and started working at different nurseries: Max & Hildy’s, Dennis’ 7 Dees, and I helped Orchard Supply Hardware open their first store in Tigard .... In 2007, I started working for Landscape Concepts in Forest Grove. In 2008, we opened a little nursery, a beautiful little two-acre retail spot with a farm (Creekside Treasures Farm and Nursery) — and then the economy tanked! We kept it going until 2013 until I decided to move on.

**What do you love most about the green industry?** My love is sales, so wherever I can find a spot and help customers get what they need, that’s what I want. Every day I wake up and think how much I love this job. Being outside is everything to me. I could never go back to a desk job.

**How have retail sales changed since the recession?** Well, this really is a luxury business. With the economic downturn, we’ve had to be less gung-ho about all the “foo-foo” items — not order as much, try to find the niches we should be catering to.

But I’ve seen it come back around the past two or three years. People are starting to spend the kind of money they used to — and they’re buying quality plants. They won’t bat an eyelash when buying a \$25 or \$30 plant, a hellebore or hosta, whereas a few years ago they’d be buying primroses or pansies.

**How do Millennials factor into retail sales?** I’m definitely starting to see the next 

## Meet the Leader

generation come in, and they are spending money! Those 25–27-year-olds who are making good money, they want to get their raised beds going and container planting. They want healthy, non-chemical, all-organic.

I'm really excited by this new crop of adults. They want things to be easy, and they're willing to pay for it. They're buying smaller houses or living in condos, but they're still farming in their own way. We've geared towards that niche by offering as many varieties of vegetable starts as possible.

### What are the greatest

### challenges facing the nursery industry today?

Younger people aren't hitting the industry. We put out job openings, and get applications from 40, 50, 60-year-old people — but where are the 20-somethings who want to lift heavy stuff all day? There's a gap. We don't get paid a lot .... It's hard to make it. And those who do come into the industry are going into permaculture, farm share, or they work in the fields for themselves. They have master's degrees in cultivation, but they're not coming into retail sales. We're missing that — their knowledge, their new ideas and ways.

### What are you looking forward to this spring?

Well, I've had a curveball thrown at me. I was just diagnosed with Stage 2 cervical cancer, so I'll be having surgery soon. I tried to tell my doctor I didn't have time for this, but for some reason he didn't find that funny.

So, I've been frantically trying to make sure staff is coming on, that my nursery looks beautiful and everything is in order, because I won't be there for a while. This season is my reality check for life; it's the first time I've had something go wrong. It's been a real eye-opener.

But still, I think we're

really pushing toward another record year for sales. Winter has been amazing already.

We're also trying to put together a class for our Retail Chapter on Millennials, with a panel interview including first-time gardeners, asking them what's motivating them to get into gardening.

### How has being involved with OAN benefitted you?

It's been great for social networking, meeting people, learning about what they do in the industry, and creating events where everyone can share their experiences. I just love being involved with other people who enjoy what they do. ☺



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