

Anthony Kinen

WHEN NORBERT Kinen couldn't come up with a name to give his new specialty tree farm, he turned to his then-teenage son Anthony, who suggested "Kinen's Big & Phat Special Plants."

The name said it all. "We grow a wide breadth of different trees and grow them really big for landscape purposes," Anthony explained. "It's a landscape architect's paradise. They can pick out a huge tree for their customers and plant it in the ground — no delayed gratification!"

From the farm's origin in 2002 to today, Anthony has done a lot of growing up — and fast. In 2011, circumstances compelled him, at the still tender age of 27, to step into some mighty big shoes when his father passed away. Anthony's mother, Kathy, had passed away a few years earlier.

Norbert was a celebrated nurseryman who served as OAN president in 1995. In 2000, he "retired" after a 25-year career with J. Frank Schmidt & Son Co. as general manager and vice president, and was inducted into the Oregon Nurseries Hall of Fame in 2002.

At the time of his father's passing, Anthony had just graduated from Portland State University with a degree in international business/marketing. Rather than liquidating all the plants and selling the land, he decided to shelve his promising career in favor of preserving — and growing upon — his father's legacy.



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"My father loved growing trees," Anthony said. "I guess some of that rubbed off on me, because I enjoy growing trees too. I guess I'm just a chip off the old block."

How did you handle the responsibility of taking over your father's farm? I grew up here and had a basic understanding of what went into the operation. I helped out during the summers and did different things when my father got busy. So I knew a little about agriculture before I got into it, but it's basically been trial by fire.

What are some of the challenges you've faced since

taking the reins? Finding quality labor nowadays in any capacity is difficult. You can find some temporary workers, but full time is tough. I've got one full-time employee, besides myself, and three seasonal workers. I mainly try to find employees by word of mouth, asking people if they know anybody in their extended circle who is looking for employment.

In talking to a lot of my customers and clients, they're having trouble finding trees in Oregon. The shortage we've been talking about for the past two years is really starting to manifest itself.

Figuring out how to expand is another problem,

MEET THE LEADER

Interview and photo
by Peter Szymczak

though. The farm is about 16 acres, but all the surrounding land is occupied. I have great neighbors all around me, but to expand operations I would need to find an open field, and that could be miles down the road, which is logistically challenging, from equipment to getting trees onto a loading dock But I'm happy with where we're at right now. It's the right size to maintain.

How has this spring been for you? During the early spring we've been doing a lot of shipping, into Canada and across the United States. I've had success picking up new customers by going to trade shows, shaking hands and talking to people.

During the fall is traditionally when landscapers come in, but it seems things are evolving — I'm seeing a lot of landscapers now! It's throwing an interesting mix into things, to have to dig today for landscapers who needed the plant yesterday, and then get it on a truck and ship it to them.

More and more people are interested in redoing their landscape and investing money into that portion of their house. I heard a news report talking about if you put in a landscape, it's the biggest bang for your buck in the value of the house. People are really taking that to heart and starting to make improvements.

Also, when you buy a new house, the first thing you want to do is sit on the deck and drink a beer — not worry about having to put in a >>>



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What are landscapers looking for right now? Anything evergreen is really popular right now. They're low maintenance, drought tolerant, and provide year-round interest. They're perfect for customers who are notorious for killing any plants they have.

What are your long-term goals for the farm? Implementing more technology and automation would come in handy, especially this time of year.

I've got two water pumps in the field across the street, so it can be a task to water everything. I can't open all the fields at once, because I don't have enough water pressure. As things are now, I have to watch over the process, which runs the risk of putting too much water on something, or not enough, which can burn up your fertilizer.

It'd be nice to have a computer program that monitors each field, making sure each gets this much water, for this much time I've researched some systems where you can put an emitter on each tree that tells the computer how much water the tree needs and it does it for you. The problem is those systems are super expensive!

What do you love most about the nursery industry? There's just something different every day. I'm never doing the same thing. So many funny little things pop up and make the days entertaining. I like the challenges and variety.

I've also enjoyed being a part of this industry. There are great people who have given me information and encouragement. People told me to stick with it and push on through.

What are you most proud of? Some days I come out here and look over the land — I can't believe I got into this with no pre-knowledge, just used the network that I have and a little deductive logic (and a little Google every now and then) to figure this all out. And everything is still alive! ☺



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