

2015-2016 EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Leigh Geschwill PRESIDENT farmerswife@fandbfarms.com	F & B Farms & Nursery 10498 Geschwill Lane N.E. Woodburn, OR 97071-9149 503-830-1388 FAX 866-608-3709
Mark Bigej PRESIDENT-ELECT mbigej@als-gardencenter.com	Al's Garden Centers 1220 N. Pacific Hwy. Woodburn, OR 97071-3616 503-981-1245 FAX 503-982-4608
Josh Zielinski VICE PRESIDENT josh@alphannursery.com	Alpha Nursery 5050 Hazelgreen Rd. N.E. Salem, OR 97305-3519 503-390-1286 FAX 503-390-2639
Mike Hiller TREASURER mike.hiller@kraemersnursery.com	Kraemer's Nursery Inc. P.O. Box 930 Mt. Angel, OR 97362 503-845-2283 FAX 503-845-6557
Mike Coleman PAST PRESIDENT mctreegrover@gmail.com	Arrowhead Ornamentals Inc. P.O. Box 157 Hubbard, OR 97032 503-651-2040 FAX 503-651-2042
Jim Simnitt SECRETARY simnittsy@canby.com	Simnitt Nursery 138 NE 22nd Ave. Canby, OR 97013 503-266-9640 FAX 503-263-6330
Walter Suttle MEMBER AT LARGE wsuttle@monrovia.com	Monrovia Growers 13455 SE Lafayette Hwy. Dayton, OR 97114-8441 503-868-7941 FAX 503-868-7352

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Don't just complain — get involved

Politicians seem to be a universally “love them or hate them” group of individuals. This is especially noticeable in a presidential election year, when campaign rhetoric is running high.



Leigh Geschwill
OAN PRESIDENT

For myself, I don't really find any current presidential candidate who speaks to the needs and issues I see facing this country, in a way that seems credible, ethical or viable.

Where are today's political heroes? Where are the people who are willing to do the hard work and the heavy lifting, and sometimes the unpopular thing? It makes me think of my favorite politicians and the personal qualities that made them great.

Hands down, my favorite president is Abraham Lincoln. Imbued with humility and fortified with strength of will and mind, he steered this country away from being torn apart. Many thought that he was foolish and that he would not succeed. Lincoln certainly felt the weight and gravity of the issues he faced. He made difficult decisions often and took personal responsibility for their outcomes.

Another politician who was an early role model for me was Margaret Thatcher. The “Iron Lady” showed she had what it took to stand as a world leader in what was still mostly a man's world. Thatcher's policies were sometimes controversial. However, she understood that taking a position was essential to success. She said, “Standing in the middle of the road is very dangerous; you get knocked down by the traffic from both sides.” While sometimes unpopular, Thatcher stuck to her guns and her beliefs, navigating some difficult times for Great Britain.

So who are our politicians of merit today? How can we be involved in shaping the outcomes they will create?

Certainly, I have seen some dedicated public servants, particularly at the local level. I don't always agree with them on every issue, but no one can deny their commitment. We need to find these kinds of people and give them our financial and moral support.

Another key component is educating these folks on our issues. Our association does a great job of connecting with our elected and appointed officials, telling our story, expressing our needs and making the “ask.” It is true that the squeaky wheel gets the grease. While I do not support “pork,” I do understand the need for our voice to be strong.

Ultimately, we want to take charge of our destiny by playing the long game. We've proven to be very good at increasing our wins and mitigating our losses.

How does this affect you? As a member of our association, you have stellar access to the political scene in Oregon. First, there is our Government Relations Committee. Typically meeting once a month, the committee helps set our platform, meets with elected and appointed officials, and serves as our “first responders” when action is needed.

Second, you can support the Oregon Nurseries' Political Action Committee (ONPAC). You can donate when you renew your membership, or you can contribute online anytime. Better yet, you can join us for the Duffers Classic on June 9, 2016 at Stone Creek Golf Club in Oregon City. Play 18 holes of golf, have lunch, and know you are supporting issues you care about.

Lastly, you can get involved with the ONPAC process. Each year we interview candidates and make decisions on our allocation of funds. Not only is this an opportunity for us to learn a candidate's viewpoints, it also gives us a chance to educate them on what is important to us.

For me, the key takeaway is that it is everyone's civic duty to get out and vote, but OAN membership allows you to stretch the value of your vote into something more. I urge you to look at these opportunities and better yet, make use of them. ©

Leigh