

Fall is for planting ideas

Ideas have a way of germinating. All they need is fertile ground, an environment that nourishes them, the patience to let them grow, and the wisdom to know when it's time to introduce them to the world.

Sadly, in an era of instant access to information, the cultivation and growth of ideas is becoming a rare commodity.

To me, a new idea is merely a doorway to a solution. Oftentimes, the final outcome ends up looking quite different. That's OK. Dialogue, feedback and critical thinking are all good.

I have urged my children to think big, to share their ideas out in the open and to explore notions with those who may not share their perspective.

My friend and colleague Tony DiGiovanni is executive director of the Landscape Ontario Horticultural Trades. He often says that the nursery industry — through associations — is the original sharing economy.

Voices from all corners of the nation and continent agree: the industry's critical function is to be the incubator of ideas, the creator of trusted networks and — most of all — a resource to help members succeed.

Ideas and grades

The OAN Board of Directors is made up of terrific volunteer leaders. They are engaged. They provide thoughtful insight to shape the products, offerings and direction of the association.

But perhaps best of all, they offer valuable ideas about how we can better integrate and involve the wide array of growers (field and greenhouse), retailers, landscapers and business partners who supply goods and services to the industry.

As your executive director, I feel as though every fall resembles the beginning of school. Grades for the prior year are reviewed. Ideas for the coming year are planted, and expectations are laid out. The board, led by President Leigh Geschwill, is focused, fiscally conservative, committed to outreach among existing and new mem-

bers, and eager to shape public policy.

This board and the association have accomplished a great deal over the past year — none of it by accident.

- We've hosted numerous open house and new member socials to break down perception barriers between the physical office and our members.

- We've held nursery tours with policymakers, and education events on topics of tremendous importance to the businesses we serve.

- We've published weekly member updates and this magazine, so you get relevant information in a timely manner.

- We've offered the online, metric-driven *OAN Nursery Guide*, and we hold our very own trade show — both designed to help plant buyers develop an enduring preference for Oregon product.

- Our programs and services during 2016 have helped protect members against a plethora of regulations and bad legislation, potentially saving them money on critical items such as health care and fuel.

- We've encouraged future industry talent through the Oregon Nurseries Foundation and its scholarship program.

We at the OAN are always looking at everything we do, from how to operate more efficiently, to how to communicate and reinforce the connections we have with the membership, through chapters, social functions or educational events. We prioritize our limited dollars to protect the industry, provide greater economic growth potential, and help growers and allies stay innovative and relevant.

There is no magic solution to anything we do. Nothing is that easy. Only through cultivating fresh ideas, considering input in good faith, encouraging thoughtful discussion and engaging in close collaboration can we chart our future course.

Be a part of the association and shape your future

Beginning next month, we will begin our membership campaign for 2017. Members ultimately get to grade the association to make sure the dollars contributed into our shared future are providing the return on investment they need.

If you are reading this and are not a



Jeff Stone
OAN EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

member, it's time to come back. It takes shared commitment to help us all survive.

We have had to do more with less, but we keep reaching out to members so they know what comes with membership.

We provide options for health care and discounted fuel for small operations — even bulk deliveries for ease of service. We have reconnected with The Oregon Garden to provide greater awareness of our past and offer special deals for every member on lodging.

Via *Nursery Guide* in print and online, as well as the national Plant Something campaign, we provide multi-platform promotion of the plants and services you offer your customers. And finally, we bring the industry together with the Farwest Show, which is on a clear upward trajectory.

People are an asset that appreciates in value. The more you invest in them, the more you receive in return. Members truly make an association — through their trust, their innovation, their loyalty and their willingness to share bold ideas. When they share a singular goal of industry success, they are unstoppable.

We inspire and invite ingenuity. We build clout and connectivity. We protect against forces that neither care for what you go through as businesses, nor fully grapple with how their decisions harm the industry's ability to endure.

We are the results of the seedling planted long ago and nourished to this moment in time.

Thank you for inspiring me to be part of this community. I urge everyone to keep pushing on those great ideas, get them out there, and plant the next generation of ideas and watch them grow. ☺