

# Mark Leichty

**T**O SAY Little Prince of Oregon does things differently is a bit of an understatement.

For starters, Little Prince grows an expansive product line that encompasses more than 1,000 plant varieties, with a focus on hardy succulents such as sedums and sempervivums. About 90 percent of Little Prince's plants are sold in 4-inch pots embossed with the company mascot — a crowned frog who proclaims, "Our Plants Won't Croak."

The company's captivating, lifestyle-oriented brand has resonated with customers, thanks in great measure to the market outreach efforts of Mark Leichty, who oversees the company's business development.

Leichty actively promotes the retail garden centers that stock Little Prince's product through various social media channels. He posts photos on Instagram, Pinterest and Facebook as a way to inspire home gardeners and drive retail traffic.

To attract buyers at trade shows, Leichty has been the creative mastermind behind several eye-catching outlandish booths. At this year's Farwest Show, for instance, he created a rock-and-roll theme — "Our Plants Rock!" — with sedum-studded musical instruments and wigs made of living plants.

"I think we're at an all-time high for creating buzz in



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the marketplace among garden centers and consumers — and it's just going to keep going up," Leichty said.

**What are the keys to Little Prince's success?** What's driven Little Prince's stratospheric growth is a product line in perfect harmony with the times. We're strictly perennials and have seen increased demand for our products.

It's a whole team effort. Ryan (Seely) is a great sales manager; he stays on top of availability and keeps up with

sales. We have a great head grower here in Mike (Hicks). Our branding was started by Ketch (de Kanter, Little Prince's president/owner), and it has become synonymous with quality plants. I make sure everyone knows about Little Prince. So, we have a dream team in terms of everyone being good at what they do and increasing our market share all the time.

Plus, we've got room to grow. I think within 10 years we'll have filled the property with greenhouses. [Little

## MEET THE LEADER

By Peter Szymczak

Prince is situated on a 25-acre property in Aurora, Oregon, with 70 shade and greenhouses at present.]

### How does social media fit into your business plan?

When I go to a retail garden center, I'm not just promoting our product — I'm trying to capture the essence of that garden center. I know when customers go into that garden center they're going to see our stuff; it looks good and presents well with our plant tags. What I do want to do is promote the garden center and drive traffic to them. I'm trying to make this three-way connection between the garden center, the wholesale grower and consumer.

### How do you decide which plants to promote on social media?

I'm really into promoting pollinator-friendly plants. We have been neonic-free at Little Prince for a little over two years now. I'm hoping that new, pollinator-friendly chemistries will come onto the market. There has to be a balance between what a business needs to create a sellable product, yet not be overrun by white flies and aphids. We try to stay on top of things with beneficial insects.

### Do you promote Little Prince in other ways?

I invite garden writers out here a lot. I'll host parties for 10–20 people. I also publish a newsletter. I'm a storyteller, so I address different things, like social issues. The newsletter has become a way for me to write about what's in my heart each week, and yet I still tie it into what we're growing here. ➤

## Meet the Leader: Mark Leichty

### What's the next big product for Little Prince?

Sedum Squared Solutions. It's a 10-by-10 square that goes on top of a birdhouse to create a living roof. Designers can use them to make big living roofs on buildings, or they can be made into living walls. We also build a cedar frame that they can be pressed into to hang individually on a wall or as a table centerpiece.

Sedums and sempervivums are so hot right now. They're drought-tolerant, great for patio gardens, and the California market loves them.

### What's your guiding business philosophy?

Never promise

more than you can deliver, and always deliver more than you promised. I don't like to disappoint people, and I always want people to be pleasantly surprised by the quality of service they get here and the quality of our plants. That's hugely important in business.

### What do you love about working at Little Prince?

We have fun. If we're not having fun, what's the point? If you're not enjoying what you're doing, you probably shouldn't be doing it.

### Are there any challenges you're facing?

I don't have

many bad days. I try to focus on what's good and have a positive attitude, every when [life] happens. I'm a pretty optimistic person.

That said, keeping up in a competitive marketplace is tough. I work long hours and spend my weekends in garden centers. I don't want there to be a drop in momentum. We have great energy right now, and I want to keep it going. Keeping the fire burning takes personal commitment and energy input.

**In what ways are you involved with the OAN?** I'm a board member, but I foresee myself becoming increasingly

involved with the OAN. I believe in what it does. It's a great way to support nurseries.

### What do you love most about the nursery industry?

I have met some of the best people I know in the nursery industry. Even though we are all competitors trying to sell sometimes the same thing to the same people, in general we get along great with each other. We always try to be helpful to people who are trying to get started in the industry, even those who we have competitive relationships with. Life is just better when we all get along together. ☺



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