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We're coming back strong!

Being born into the nursery industry has given me a unique perspective and appreciation for what the Oregon Association of Nurseries is all about.



Mark Bigej
OAN PRESIDENT

For those of you whom I haven't had the pleasure of meeting, I am Mark Bigej, your incoming OAN president.

I am a third-generation member of Al's Garden Centers. Our family business got its start in 1948 when my grandpa and grandma, Al and Ann Bigej, started a roadside fruit stand on Highway 99E in Woodburn.

My father, Jack Bigej, was their middle son and enjoyed the business, but he thought it would be good to mix in plants. That's when our story as a garden center began.

In the 1980s, we expanded by growing bedding plants. As a grower and retailer, we have three retail garden centers with three growing locations that are dedicated to producing more than 75 percent of the plant material we sell.

The OAN has contributed to many of my fondest memories growing up. The annual Convention was always a highlight for my family. I attended as a kids' program member and for those lifers out there, I used to love competing in the Nursery Olympics.

In high school, I was the lucky recipient of the OAN Retail Chapter Scholarship, which helped me pursue an education in horticulture at Oregon State University and Iowa State University.

As a young, newly married man, I was convinced by the OAN — along with my new bride — to lead the kids' program. In spite of that experience, we went on to have five kids of our own!

In 2000, I was the committee chair for the Yard, Garden and Patio Show, with the help of a great leader and mentor, Eammon Hughes. I became a member of the Executive Committee in 2011 and the rest, as they say, is history.

What I love most about our industry are the people. I don't know any other industry that is so kind and selflessly willing to share ideas and help others succeed.

This is an exciting time in OAN history. I've seen the highs where everyone was sold out of plants, and I've seen the lows where growers couldn't sell a plant to save their life. Today, nurseries all around us are planting new fields and thriving. We're coming back strong!

The USDA reports that nursery and greenhouse crops are the second-leading agricultural crop by gross sales in Oregon — but not by much. This coming year should put us back in our rightful place as Oregon's number-one crop.

Growing up in the industry, I had the pleasure of watching my dad serve on the Executive Committee and as the president of the OAN. I have fond memories of watching some great presidents of that time serve the OAN, including Paul Fukasawa, Rod Park, Kathie Femrite, Art Anderson and of course, my dad.

In light of my lifelong association with the OAN, it is humbling and truly an honor to serve our industry in this capacity. I look forward to the challenges and opportunities that 2017 may bring.

I strongly encourage everyone in the industry to get involved as we move forward.

The more involved you are, the more you and your business will benefit! Thank you for giving me the opportunity to serve and represent our great state as OAN president. ☺