

Seven wonders of the OAN Convention

When the industry gets together at Convention, memories get made.

Our most recent OAN Convention was set in beautiful Central Oregon at the Sunriver Resort. The co-hosts of the Convention were two titans of our industry: Tom Fessler of Woodburn Nursery and Azaleas, and Dick Joyce of Joyce Farms. They set an excellent tone for the proceedings.

A lot happens during the course of two days. Here are my seven highlights of the OAN Convention. What were yours?

7. Kids. Over the course of the weekend we heard time and again about how many of our leaders grew up going to the OAN Convention. They recalled fun memories of taking part in the kids program. If this year's Convention is any indication, then that tradition is even stronger today. Our high-school-aged kids supervised the program, creating fun new memories for the younger set. It really drove home the idea that Oregon's nursery industry, and the Convention, are all about families.

6. Verl Holden leads the way. Verl Holden was president of our association in 1977. Almost 40 years later, he still keeps giving back. No wonder we call him "the Dean of the Past Presidents." The timeless leader of the association was easily found at Sunriver holding longtime and new members at rapt attention with his wisdom and stories of how this industry built itself into what it is today.

Verl was joined at Convention by more than a dozen other past presidents, including the newest and most recent, Leigh Geschwill. I am proud that so many of our past presidents remain active. These fine people are not fragile figurines placed carefully on the shelf. They work continually to improve the association to better serve the members' needs.

5. The Hospitality Suites. Nursery folks like to have fun. The opening night Hospitality Suites are always a Convention highlight. This year, sponsors Columbia Bank, Crop Production Services, Leonard Adams Insurance and F & B Farms & Nursery/Arrowhead Ornamentals provided

good food and good themes in abundance.

Want some awesome tri-tip? There you go. Italian? Done. Mouthwatering BBQ? Got that too. Pizza? Who doesn't love the most versatile food on the planet? Ring it up. Best of all, one could move seamlessly between the four suites and have a great night.

An old adage says, "There is nothing like a packed room to make everyone feel that they had fun." Packed room? We had four. By that yardstick, the 2016 suites were an unqualified success.

4. Issues that matter. The association is a business organization. As such, we report out to the membership the state of our finances, thank our volunteer leaders for their service on state or chapter boards, and hear from our incoming president about what the industry means to them and what the year could bring. We also use the time together at the annual meeting to address some of the challenges we face as an industry.

Labor is a huge issue for nurseries, both in terms of the lack of an available workforce and bone-crushing new federal and state regulations. For the OAN, it's not enough just to inform members of what is coming at them; it's our duty to help them understand and comply so they don't find themselves on the short end of a very sharp regulatory stick.

Second, the task force on board composition presented its report to the membership on how the association should change its governance structure. Associations are changing and so are boards. The task force outlined how the association can develop leaders so that we can be successful for the next 40 years. We will talk more about this over the course of 2017.

3. Laughter. Pure and simple. There was a lot of it. The friendships are clear and it was terrific seeing the members catch up with one another. The networking part is not bad, too! Face-to-face time cannot be matched.

2. New leadership emerging. It must have been quite something. Several past presidents got to see their children become leaders — leaders of an industry they built



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with their own hands. The association is very fortunate to have very capable, intelligent, industry-born leaders taking the reins. Take a look at who is stepping forward and give them some adulation. Board service is an unselfish act of love for our industry. This year, we have a great group, led by Mark Bigej.

1. Celebrating our members. The President's Awards Banquet is personally my favorite part of the entire Convention experience. We honored the longtime outstanding service of Kathy LeCompte (Brooks Tree Farm), the innovation and manufacturing of Sid Wurdinger, the outstanding activity of the Mt. Hood Chapter, and the political awareness of Steve Shropshire of Jordan Ramis P.C., who goes far beyond the call of duty.

The Peters Company (Rick and Elizabeth Peters) got a tip of the cap for the horticultural allied trades; third-generation nursery operator Kyle Fessler (St. Christopher Nursery) was honored as the New Nursery Professional of the Year; and 40-year industry veteran Chris Guntermann was recognized with an Honorary Life Membership. Last, but not least, Pete Brentano (Brentano's Tree Farm) received the Clayton Hannon Distinguished Service Award.

Leigh Geschwill wrapped up her presidency and honored several individuals for their distinct service to the association — none more impactful than recognition of longtime member Cindy Lou Pease of Evans Farms. It was a perfect ending to a great night.

Thank you to all who attended the OAN Convention. I am excited about what 2017 will bring and hope you will join us in celebration next year! ☺