

Josh Robinson

JOSH ROBINSON has a winning smile and many things to smile about. Indeed, 2016 was a watershed year, professionally and personally, for him — the whole Robinson family, actually.

Last year, Josh and his wife Ashley welcomed a son, Thomas, into their family, which also includes 9-year-old Kaden. The growing family moved into a new home located on a corner lot of the Robinson family farm in Amity, Oregon.

Josh's folks, Rick and Roxanne Robinson, have a house in another corner of their property, and Josh's older brother (by a year and 10 months) Chris is planning to build a house near where the container yard is.

"Soon we'll have all the corners covered," Josh said.

Meanwhile, Josh furthered his career in the nursery industry by taking on a leadership role as chair of the Membership Committee with the Oregon Association of Nurseries. The post will take full advantage of his strong networking and social marketing skills, which he developed as the founder of the Young Nursery Professionals.

Josh formed YNP as a way to make friends and establish business connections with others who wanted to build careers in the nursery industry. The group grew to a few hundred members before merging last year with Emergent: A Group for Growing Professionals, which continues the shared mission of connecting horticultural professionals under the age of 40.

To cap off his banner year, Josh's father put a succession plan in place to transfer



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ownership of Robinson Nursery to his sons. Josh and Chris are each taking on 20 percent ownership.

The Robinson brothers make a balanced left-brain/right-brain team. While Chris is focused on overseeing production of the nursery's large variety of container and bare-root ornamental shade trees and shrubs, Josh is the outgoing one, in charge of keeping sales on track and improving the bottom line.

Now that you're co-owner of your family's nursery operation, what are your goals for the next year?

Our tagline is "Growing expectations," and that's what I'm going to do. For me, that phrase means maintaining

good relationships with our customers, good inventory management and growing what people are asking for — and always keeping my ear to the ground.

Traditionally, we've grown in the field 100 percent. Then about 10 years ago, we started growing in containers. We listened to what people want. Shifting to containers is what the market asked for and it made business sense.

This year, we're about 50-50: half container, half bare root. We've transformed since '08-'09, and it's been a way to separate ourselves from other growers.

What's the family dynamic in your business?

My dad, brother and I

MEET THE LEADER

Interview and photo by Peter Szymczak

have a production meeting over coffee and get things accomplished that in a big company would take a chain of people. We can tweak our production schedule on the fly: for instance, if a sales guy calls and says he needs a certain tree, we source some seedlings and get them salable as soon as we can.

We're able to turn on a dime. "A small ship, you can turn her easy," as Dad says.

What are your goals for the OAN Membership Committee?

I'm looking at how we recruit new members, the process the OAN goes through to outline the value the OAN offers its members.

What does it mean if I'm not in the OAN, looking outside? If I'm a small nursery and I join the healthcare group, for instance, there are significant potential savings when you join. I've got my eye trained on what else we can do to entice people to join.

Do you think the new generation of nursery professionals looks at value differently?

Speaking for myself, networking is something you can't put a value on. When we hire a new sales rep, for instance, we can put out job listings, but the way good people get hired is through word of mouth and taking recommendations from people you know. It takes the guesswork out.

When you look at our workforce, however, there aren't a lot of young people waiting in the wings to



Meet the Leader: Josh Robinson

take the place of the current generation. Fifty percent of nurseries today don't have a succession plan — that's scary! It's sad to lose the legacy of a family farm.

So my goal, ever since starting the Young Nursery Professionals, and now with the OAN, is to get everyone together in a room full of people who are looking for opportunity. As a young owner of a business, I'm looking for employees who will grow with us.

Participation in the OAN is a great way to make connections and friends with people who you are going to be in business with for years

to come. If we can get the chapters going strong again and get involvement happening there, good things will come from that. We've got a younger generation growing up that wants to give back.

Do you think the OAN can connect the new generation of growers with those who helped grow the industry into what it is today?

Absolutely! People like Mark Krautmann at Heritage Seedlings have been instrumental in forming the idea of needing to rally young people. He and others like him have so much valuable knowledge and

experience, there's got to be a medium where we can connect the old with the new, but the platform isn't quite there yet. How can we join Mark Krautmann with a young plant propagator? That's what I want to see happen.

My generation, we thrive off of that — we love to collaborate with each other and get together in groups. That speaks to our management style, too. We're always knocking ideas around with each other, asking what other people think. Some people are more creative than others; ideas just flow out of them. Others are better at

refining those ideas.

How do you balance new ways of doing things with traditional values?

If there's a guiding light for how I operate day to day, it's the Golden Rule: Treat people how you'd like to be treated. You have to empathize. Customer service is my job, which extends to our employees.

One thing my dad has always stressed is having a plan and always improving on it. I have a Word document I pop open every once in a while to make sure I'm staying on task with personal, professional and spiritual goals. ©



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