

Wes Bailey

Fall is a busy time for Wes Bailey. But then, he is never one to sit still.

Fall is football season (he coaches a youth football team), and retail garden centers are busy stocking poinsettias — half a million of which are grown at the Smith Gardens site in Aurora, Oregon, where Bailey has been site manager for 12 years and running.

This past year, Bailey helped oversee an eight-acre expansion of the Aurora site, with help from the Aurora team and support from the home office. It is one of four greenhouse and nursery facilities owned and operated by Smith Gardens, the third-generation, family-owned operation founded 110 years ago in Bellingham, Washington.

The Aurora site is located on a busy traffic highway, right off Oregon Route 551 (Wilsonville-Hubbard Highway). It has quick, easy access to other bustling roadways — Interstate 5 and Boones Ferry Road Northeast.

Across the street is the Aurora State Airport, which further adds to the site's continuous swirl of activity.

How has the Aurora facility grown during your time here?

It's six or seven-fold larger than when I first came here. One of the things I enjoy and thrive on is continuously being pushed and challenged, whether it's growth or improvement. It's been a great opportunity to see all the growth and development over these past 12 years.

The most recent expansion was an eight-acre addi-

tion — all brand-new, finished in early spring of this year. It involved our shipping, distribution, HR, growing and production teams. We put in 11 loading docks and moved our staging/loading area.

We deliver to Oregon, Washington, Alaska, and some into Canada. Our primary customers are the big box stores: Home Depot, Lowe's, Wal-Mart, some Fred Meyer and Costco.

Four years ago, we built out three and a half acres on the property, and we went to a

newer technology — a cascade flood floor system.

What's the advantage of the cascade flood floor system?

You can control the level of watering to the plants, more so than traditional ebb and flow. Another advantage is we have concrete or asphalt everywhere on our property, so we're able to take out shipping carts for production and moving and shipping — wherever people are working, they can take a cart to the point of use.

MEET THE LEADER

Interview and photo by
Peter Szymczak



Where does the Aurora site fit in with Smith Gardens' other facilities?

Smith Gardens owns and operates four facilities. The home office and one of the production facilities is in Bellingham, Washington.

Our facility in Marysville, Washington, is a large perennial operation with 60-plus acres of field and 500,000 square feet of greenhouse space. They also do some color annuals and hanging baskets.

Watsonville, California, is where we grow premium annuals and perennials. We also have a division called Pacific Plug & Liner, where they do seeded annuals and vegetative liners.

Our facility in Aurora, Oregon has probably the largest mix of products: primarily color annuals, lots of hanging baskets and containers.

With the expansion of our Aurora facility, we can now hang 115,000 baskets at a time. We do some perennials, a hydrangea program, a ground cover program and about 500,000 poinsettias a year.

How do poinsettias fit into the overall product mix?

We like to build up the shoulders as much as we can, so that we can provide year-round employment for as many people as we can. But in the nursery industry, there's only so much demand for certain products throughout the year.

So, we diversify ourselves and grow other things during the shoulders of the >>

WORK

Site Manager, Smith Gardens, Aurora, Oregon

OAN

Executive Committee, Member-at-Large (2016-17); Government Relations Committee; ONPAC (Oregon Nurseries' Political Action Committee)

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Meet the Leader: Wes Bailey, Smith Gardens

seasons to occupy people — that's what doing a half a million poinsettias does.

Poinsettias are our longest crop time, aside from hydrangeas. It's a challenge, because they're so susceptible to disease and virus and pests.

Our customers expect a uniform product, which has to be a certain height and width, with a certain number of flowers that varies by pot size. If you don't meet those specs, then you can't ship those plants.

How would you describe your job as site

manager at the Aurora facility?

My job is to serve everybody and be their leader. I have to keep in mind what are the most important things for the people around me. Our goal as leaders here at Smith Gardens is to empower our staff to make decisions. They are creative people with great ideas, and when they feel empowered, they become engaged in the business.

What have you enjoyed about working in the horticulture industry?

It's a constant challenge. Even for us now, when people say it's the slow time of the season, we're already preparing for next year. The poinsettia crop doesn't let you rest.

But in my life I've always liked a constant challenge. I'm not a person who likes to sit around very much. My idea of relaxing is going hiking or going to the gym — that helps me feel good, focus on me and forget about everything else.

What are the benefits of being involved with

the Oregon Association of Nurseries?

It's a way for me to give back to the industry. I get to see just how much the OAN does for our industry.

Being involved politically has been great. If we're not representing ourselves, then who is?

It's been a great learning experience. The decisions legislators make have an impact on our industry. Being in front of the legislators and the governor, speaking about what's important to our industry — it makes a difference. ☺

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