



Josh Zielinski
OAN PRESIDENT

It's good to be back on top

For folks I haven't had the pleasure of meeting, I am Josh Zielinski and I am thrilled to be your incoming OAN president.

These are exciting times in our industry. It feels good to come in just a few months after USDA reported that nursery and greenhouse crops are back on top in Oregon agriculture, with higher gross sales than any other crop in our state. Good job, everyone!

Now, a little about myself: I am a fifth-generation farmer and second-generation nurseryman. I help run our family business, Alpha Nursery, which was started 40 years ago by my dad, Doug, as just a single greenhouse on the family farm.

Our business has grown, and these days, we have many more greenhouses. Early on, we serviced the local landscape trade with a dozen varieties. Now, we cater to independent garden centers across North America with hundreds of diverse offerings.

Like many in this unique industry, my nursery career started shortly after I could walk and talk. Around age 5, I was given my first paid position stacking 2¼-inch pots for \$0.75 an hour with my younger brother, Scott. From there, General Manager R.J. Tancredi (who is still with our company today!) made good use of our small statures and promoted us to weeding!

They were simple times and I always enjoyed the work, the customers, and the other "nursery people." I grew up seeing them at OAN functions such as the annual Convention, when they would be dressed for various themes, ranging from cowboys to hippies.

I got to see my dad — with the help of my mom, Jamie — lead the OAN as its president in 2000 before I left for college in Southern California, where I studied business and Spanish. Many waves and a few books later, I had graduated — only to quickly learn that most other jobs didn't offer the rewarding experience of creating living products from a cutting or a seed.

It wasn't but a couple months before I began working for a large nursery. There, I made lots of great connections and learned some valuable lessons before coming home.

Perhaps a week after returning to Oregon, I found myself in a "GR" meeting at the OAN. While I certainly recognized many faces in the room, even without their hippie costumes on, I honestly didn't know that GR stood for Government Relations — or what that even meant.

Within a half hour, I'd met with three or four state representatives and watched plainclothed plantsmen and women relate what really matters to them, their employees and their industry. I was moved by the experience. I must have gone to enough GR meetings over the years, because in 2014 I ended up chairing the committee!

One thing led to another, and with the encouragement of many mentors, my co-workers, and perhaps most importantly my family — including my wife Kattie and daughter Alyce — here I am.

As I mentioned, it feels good to be a part of a high point in our industry's economic cycle. We should take a moment to recognize the hard work that allowed our industry to achieve nearly \$1 billion in sales last year.

But, rather than use all of our energy celebrating, we should reinvest it in the future of our businesses and our Oregon nursery industry. Just how we do that is a great challenge and one I look forward to collaborating with all members on over the next year and beyond. ☺

2017-2018

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