

A team effort for your success

It was my great privilege to serve as president of the Nursery and Landscape Association Executives (NLAE) of North America for the past two years.

I am the third Oregonian to serve in that role. Merv Belknap was the first in 1969-70, followed by Dan Barnhart in 1989-90.

The NLAE is a team of committed executive leaders from all over the country, and six Canadian provinces, serving the green industry. It started in 1947 and slowly became what it is today, thanks to many hardworking people, including now-retired OAN Executive Director (and legend) Clayton Hannon.

Once a year at our convention, we get together to solve common issues, learn from each other and work together to serve you, our combined membership. My colleagues in NLAE bring a lot of talent to the table, but the most important thing we share is the experience, commitment and desire to work every day to help your business thrive.

Common denominators

Months before the convention, we assemble a geographically diverse subset of executives to identify issues that are impacting the industry and top-line challenges facing nursery associations. We discuss topics that are impacting our members today, and we also get a jump on emerging and critical issues that are on the horizon.

The breadth and strength of individual nursery associations creates a pathway to get to the heart of a matter, dissect it, and build possible solutions.

Workforce woes are a consistent agenda item, not only with the labor shortage that is limiting economic growth, but the positive side of the issue — we talk about ideas that work in various parts of the continent. There is a common misunderstanding that our Canadian partners have immigration figured out, but they have many structural and policy issues, just like the rest of us.

Other items on our agenda include pollinators, water supply, transportation infrastructure, land use and taxation, and it's great to hear the diverse opinions.

It's worth noting that associations are

run like a business. (Many of the elected officials I talk to don't understand this.) We must grapple with the same issues our members do — minimum wage changes, overtime regulations and the myriad of imposed workplace requirements.

It is not enough for associations to deal with these issues and provide a lean organization — we must also protect the industry. As NLAE members, we're always looking at the return on investment we are providing to our members, as well as tools to communicate that ROI. Some associations offer discounts for health insurance, fuel or truck purchases, to name a few examples. Others, like the OAN, have a trade show to market members and the industry.

As we discuss all this, we also make an effort to learn from each other. Cassie Larson, the tremendous leader out of Minnesota, conducts a "30 ideas in 30 minutes" session. It includes ready to use tips from everything from social media to nursery certification techniques. I always get something out of it.

You are the heroes

All of the executives agree, without a doubt, that the members are the heroes of our associations. You grow and sell plants, work with your hands and make something you can sell with pride.

Being in business is not easy. We understand that you want a rewarding career in the green industry. If you didn't love plants, you'd probably be doing something else.

Your associations also see you as a business run by honest people. We want others to see you that way too. We wish to help provide a regulatory environment of financial stability for owning, operating and expanding your business.

We cheer your success and help with working through your problems. Working with regulators can make you frustrated, anxious or downright angry. Dealing with entrenched agencies can be too much for an individual business to bear.

A unified and aggregated voice, which blends both smaller and larger operations, has proven effective and has the added benefit of shedding a regulatory burden from daily work at the nursery.

Associations also look for a number of ways for each member to engage the nursery community. The OAN utilizes open



Jeff Stone
OAN EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

houses, chapters organizing tours and chats, organized relevant content to impart critical information or bring together segments of our industry. It is affirming that my colleagues around North America all pursue a "member first" attitude.

Improvement through collaboration

Expert speakers have a role in increasing the knowledge base of our nursery executives every year at the NLAE Convention, but candidly, one of the best parts of the annual meeting are the informal exchanges of ideas. We chat without an agenda, just sharing the things that work and more so, the efforts that do not pan out. It is really cool that size does not matter — all of us contribute ways we can do a better job for you.

The OAN shares information on the programs and services we provide to members. We get great feedback about *Digger*, Nursery Guide and the Farwest Show. The new promotional materials of the Farwest Show, which show our members as the core of the show (which they no doubt are), received strong praise. I think it is awesome and was excited to hear that others did too.

Grateful to OAN Leadership

NLAE is an information resource and professional network for nearly 100 association executives — an intimate group dedicated to advancing their associations and the industry as a whole. I am grateful for the leadership of the OAN to allow me to grow as a professional, network with green industry leaders and hone leadership skills.

Both the OAN and NLAE work toward making sure that you, the members of the nursery and greenhouse industry, grow and prosper and continue to make a difference. ☺