

# The Pacheco brothers

**Four decades ago, Doug Zielinski – then a recent Oregon State University graduate, fresh off an internship at Kraemer's Nursery – decided to chase a dream by becoming a fourth generation farmer.**

Doug's father, Ernie, had taken over the farm when he was just 15 years old, after Doug's grandfather, Charlie, suddenly passed away.

The farm had never grown nursery crops, but Doug wanted to change that. He felt it would generate year-round work while diversifying revenue. So he threw some gravel for containerized plants on a small portion of the family's prime farmland and asked three seasonal farm employees to help him start the nursery operation.

It was a humble beginning; with one greenhouse, a table for propagation and a single order of liners. That was it.

Doug felt that he was on the right track, and time proved him correct. Alpha now spans 150 acres of elite nursery container production for trees and shrubs. That nicely complements the farm's 2,500 acres, where specialty seeds, hops, hazelnuts and row crops are grown.

It is a family deal. Co-owner Jamie has been married to Doug for 38 years. Their two sons, Josh and Scott, comprise the fifth generation of Zielinskis farming the same land.

## Three days becomes 36 years

The fact that this is the "People Issue" of *Digger* fits like a glove with the story of Alpha Nursery. The farm is a family operation and it is that sense of closeness that drew in three brothers – Angel, Cresencio and Martin Pacheco.

Doug Zielinski credits the Pacheco brothers with building Alpha into what it is today. The brothers joined Alpha in the early 1980s, just as the nursery was coming of age.

Angel was the first to join. In fact, he was working that morning when Doug and Jamie went to the hospital for the birth of future OAN Board President Josh Zielinski. Doug's initial offer was for a three-day job. Angel never left, and now has been at Alpha for 36 years.

Cresencio was next to join. Angel jokes that his younger brother needed a ride, so he put him to work at the nursery. Martin was the third to come onboard. He has loved doing a multitude of jobs at Alpha.

All three brothers started on the farm side, doing whatever needed to be done. "If you see it, no need to wait. Just do what is needed." That was their ethos. As the nursery expanded, all three of the Pacheco brothers found their work increasing too.

These days, the brothers are in charge of critical operations within the nursery. Each has selected a unique path. Angel is responsible for potting sheds and the planting schedule. Martin is in charge of logistics and manages the loading dock, day-to-day pulling plants for orders and keeping shipping inventory. Cresencio is in charge of propagation, leading a crew to carry it out.

## Family roots

Being part of the nursery community and living in Oregon was important to the Pacheco brothers. Their roots in the Salem-Keizer area run deep.

All three became naturalized citizens through the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986, which became law under President Ronald Reagan. Ten employees from Alpha went through IRCA. Five remain to this day.

All three brothers own homes. They have raised families in adjacent towns to the nursery. After Angel became a citizen, he brought his wife and three children to the states. He now has seven grandchildren. Martin married in the United States and has six children and ten grandchildren. Cresencio married four years ago.

From time to time, the brothers visit their country of origin, Mexico, where they reconnect with family. They visit their mother, who is now 88, along with two brothers who remain in Mexico. (A sister lives in the



Jeff Stone  
OAN EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Salem area.) Even though they are citizens, it is still dicey going south to visit family. They must take turns in order to make sure that the nursery is not harmed if they were to be improperly detained. It's a shame they have to worry about that.

## Doing what they love

The Pacheco brothers don't just have careers in the nursery industry, but something more: the knowledge that when you like what you do, it doesn't really seem like work.

The workers at Alpha take care of each other. On any day you will see new employees, teams of dedicated and skilled plant craftsmen, and another longtime instrumental employee of Alpha, General Manager R.J. Tancredi, defying Father Time and working harder each day. With outstanding customer service at the front office, it all adds up to Alpha being a special, family-owned business.

Angel, Cresencio and Martin have a lifetime of experience in a dynamic industry, growing high-quality plants, raising a family and being part of the community. But as we are seeing in the other parts of the industry and in agriculture, the brothers are starting to age out. Angel will retire this year. Cresencio was mum about his plans. Martin wants to keep going strong.

Doug Zielinski believes that his nursery is as only as good as its workers. He's right. The Pacheco brothers have demonstrated how much three brothers can do to make a fundamental impact in the way they help shape and grow a nursery. ☺