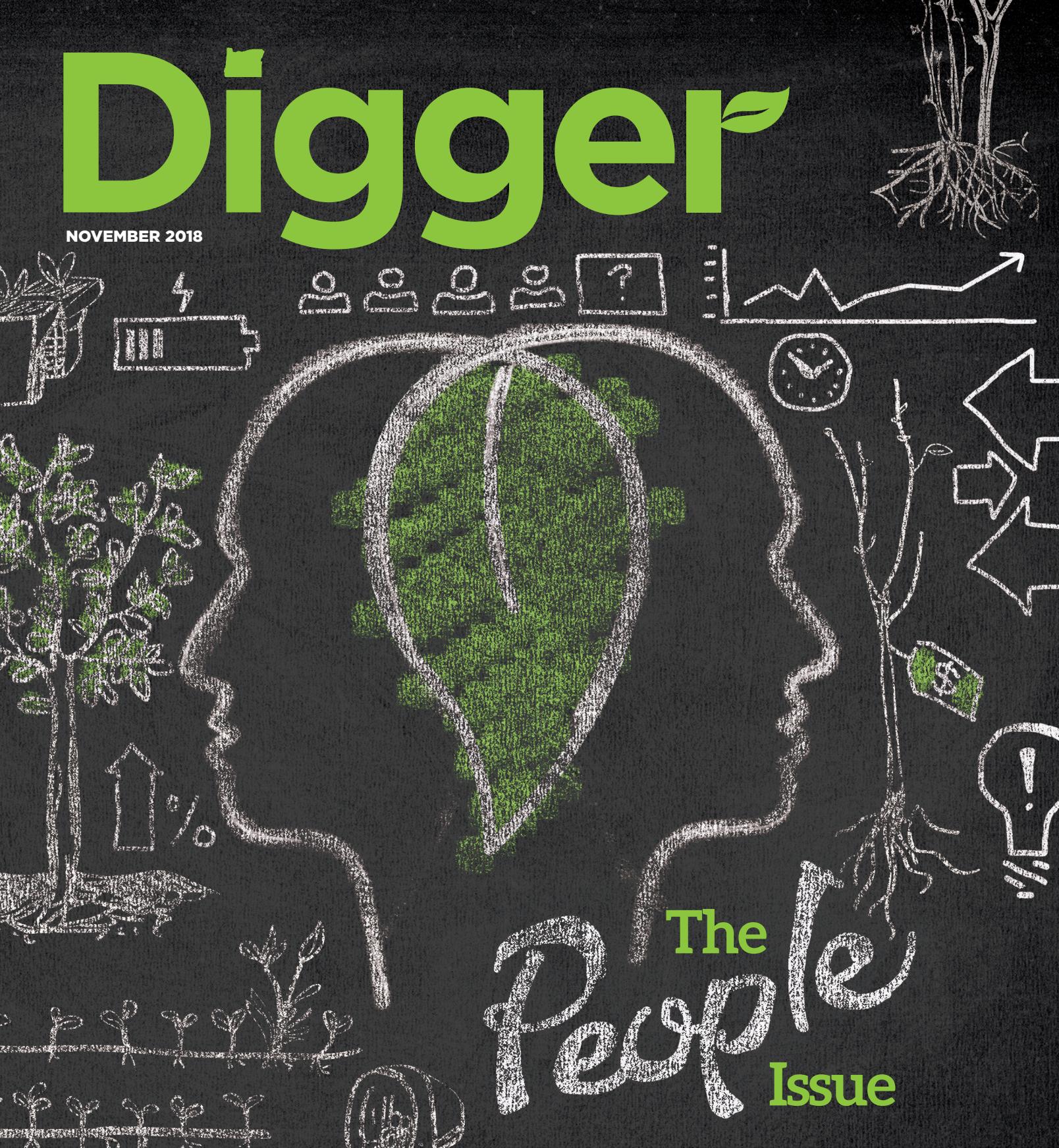


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The *People* Issue

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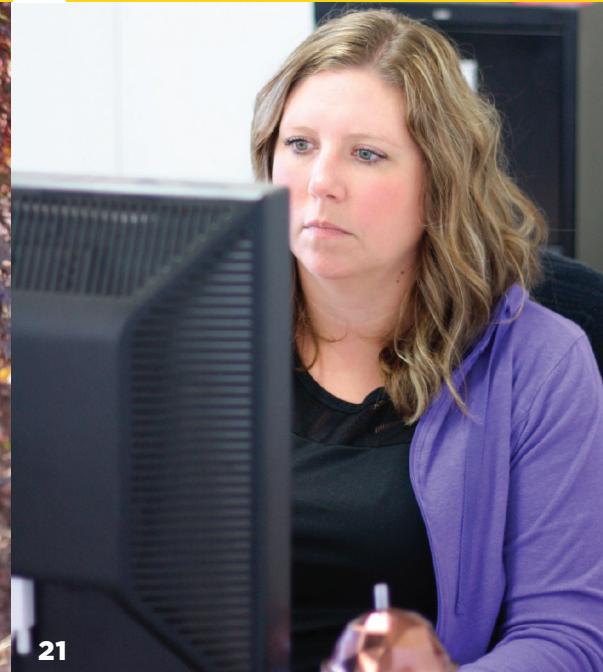
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November 2018 Vol. 62 No. 11



The People Issue

In Oregon, nurseries and their people ship close to \$1 billion worth of ornamental nursery and greenhouse plants per year. That's why you will seldom find a nursery owner or manager who does not appreciate the critical role of employees at every level.

13 Your remarkable team

How growers are finding — and retaining — the leaders and workers they need for business success.

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Family-owned businesses must balance work and family roles.

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On the cover: Growers and staff share a unique mindset in the green industry

On this page: (Left) Conrado Ortega, JLPN staff member, gathered seeds from a tree.
(Right) Sarah Noble, staff member at Peoria Gardens, manages office needs.



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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Support is critical

**My name is Mike Hiller, I work at
 Kraemer's Nursery in Mt. Angel,
 Oregon, and I am proud to be your
 new OAN president.**

But how did I find myself in this position?

Several years ago, Mike Coleman approached me to consider joining the Executive Committee of the OAN Board of Directors. I asked him to give me a couple of days for my response.

That night, I talked over this decision with my wife, Kirstin. I knew that she would be the most critical person in helping me make this commitment. After that, I went to my boss, Paul Kraemer. His blessing was key. I then went down the list with all of my co-workers, because I knew that I would need their support as well. We all have a responsibility at home and at work, and I wanted to be able to fully commit to the association I belong to.

Once I had everyone's support, I called Mike up and agreed to be on the Executive Committee slate for 2014–15 as board secretary. That was followed by two years serving as treasurer and one year as president-elect.

With that hindsight and experience, I can say now that joining Executive Committee was one of the best decisions I have ever made.

I wanted to explain this because support is critical to success in any endeavor — especially ours. For the OAN, we need involvement from everyone. The more legs we can put on a chair, the better we are — as long as they are strong, even and equally spaced.

Being involved with the OAN at this level has given me a hands-on education. I have seen how many resources are put into everything to ensure businesses succeed in this industry. We face many issues in this industry. Many of us do not fully understand how much the association is actually helping us.

For example, when bureaucrats proposed a new property tax on hoop houses, the OAN helped them see how unfair that would have been. The proposal went nowhere. When legislators began talking about minimum wage increases, the OAN had a seat at the table and secured a longer phase-in for agricultural operations (all of us — not just nursery operations). The final outcome reflected the fact that businesses need time to adjust, and economic realities are different in rural Oregon than in the Portland metropolitan area.

These are just a few examples of issues that we have faced.

Looking to the future, there are key vitals that we deal with on a daily basis. The two biggest are labor and water. Of course, we have many others, but these are fundamental.

Recently, I was talking with a grower about the struggles they face. One of the many things that were brought up was how we need to help support research at the university level. We need improved genetics for our plants, and protocols for dealing with pests and diseases. We need to support the entities that eliminate barriers and help us maintain access to interstate markets. A major one is our Oregon Department of Agriculture.

This support is critical for Oregon nurseries. We must maintain our position as top tier producers, always reassuring our customers that we are doing everything right.

We will need everyone's support on working on these issues, so please get involved! When you have a concern, please reach out. My goal for this upcoming year as President is to continue to build off all the hard work from everyone who has come before, up to and including my immediate predecessor, Josh Zielinski at Alpha Nursery. Josh is part of a family that has dedicated themselves to the association. He has been a tremendous leader, guiding us to be responsive to the needs of our diverse membership. He's been a steady hand with a talented board of directors.

By supporting our industry in any number of ways throughout the coming year, you can help us keep Oregon in the top position amongst nursery states that we have earned. ☺



Mike Hiller
OAN PRESIDENT



Calendar

Get the word out about your event! Email details to calendar@oan.org by the 10th day of the month to be included in the next issue of *Digger*.

SIGN UP THROUGH DECEMBER

WINTER TRUCKS TO TRADE SHOWS

OAN members can ship plant material to the green industry shows held across the country in January and February, including MANTS, The Western, Utah Green and others. Reservations are taken on a first-come, first served basis; payment is required to reserve space. To sign up, contact Kelsey Hood at khood@oan.org.

TODAY THROUGH JANUARY 1

OAN MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL DISCOUNT

OAN members can renew their membership anytime before April 1, but if you submit your payment before January 1, you can skip the annual dues increase. The early bird discount is just one more perk to add to the list of all the other OAN membership benefits you already receive, such as: savings through our health and dental insurance programs, Legal Access benefit, and Trucks to Trade Shows program; visibility through the Farwest Show, online and print *Nursery Guide*, *Digger* magazine, *Retail Nurseries and Garden Centers Road Map*; and educational opportunities at trade show seminars, and networking with peers at chapter gatherings. Complete your renewal through our online form at www.oan.org, or call 503-682-5089.

NOVEMBER 8-9

OREGON WATER LAW CONFERENCE

The 27th annual Water Law Conference will be held in the Belmont Ballroom of Crowne Plaza, Portland, Oregon. This year's agenda includes a special presentation by Jason D. Miner, policy manager of the Oregon Governor's Office of Natural Resources. General and ethics credits may apply for those who attend. To register, log on to www.theseminargroup.net.

NOVEMBER 15-16

PARTNERS IN COMMUNITY FORESTRY CONFERENCE

Orange County, California will host this year's conference, which is presented by the Arbor Day Foundation. The two-day event will bring together urban forestry professionals, environmental nonprofits, growers and educators to discuss the various ways of strengthening community forests. For details and to register, log on to www.arborday.org/pfcf.

NOVEMBER 19

SAVE ON DIGGER DISPLAY ADS

Take advantage of last year's advertising rates by reserving six ads or more in *Digger* magazine for 2019. Contact Blair Thompson at bthompson@oan.org by November 19 for the special early bird rates. Frequency discounts are available.



NOVEMBER 7

OAN WILLAMETTE WEDNESDAY

As part of a celebration of Woodburn Nursery's 50th anniversary, the OAN Willamette Chapter invites members and guests to Willamette Wednesday, 11:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m. November 7, 2018 at Woodburn Nursery & Azaleas Inc., 13009 McKee School Road NE, Woodburn, Oregon. Lunch will be provided by Gary's BBQ on Wheels. Guests will tour the Robert G. Linderman Insect Rearing Facility, learn about new efficiency tools and technology, and hear from Chemeketa Community College representatives about their Ag Complex expansion. Please RSVP by November 1 at tinyurl.com/yard5hf4.

NOVEMBER 28-29

FIRST AID AND CPR CLASSES

OAN-sponsored First Aid and Adult CPR training classes are open for registration. Conducted in English, the first class will run 8 a.m.-noon, Wednesday, November 28. The second Spanish-only class will take place 8 a.m.-noon, Thursday, November 29. Sign up early to guarantee your seat in the course, as registrations will only be accepted up until two days before the class begins. Successful completion results in certification that is good for two years. Both sessions take place at the OAN office, 29751 S.W. Town Center Loop West, Wilsonville, Oregon. Register online at www.oan.org/cprclass.

West Pratt St., Baltimore, Maryland). MANTS is one of the largest green industry trade shows on the East Coast, attracting more than 900 exhibitors and 10,000 attendees annually. For more information, log on to www.mants.com.

DECEMBER 3-8

IRRIGATION SHOW & EDUCATION CONFERENCE

The world's largest trade show dedicated to irrigation will take place in Long Beach, California. Attendees can make plans to see technical session and seminars, view new products and technologies, and find solutions to any and all issues in agriculture, landscape, golf and turf irrigation. For more information, visit www.irrigation.org/2018Show

JANUARY 16-18, 2019

THE WESTERN

The Western Nursery & Landscape Association's annual trade show and conference, known as The Western, will take place at the Crown Center Exhibit Hall, 2323 McGee St., Kansas City, Missouri. WNLA represents the green industry in Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma, Iowa and Nebraska. For more information and to register, log on to www.wnla.org/western.

JANUARY 16-19

NORTHWEST AG SHOW

Held in a new location this year, the 49th edition of the Northwest Ag Show will be held at the Oregon State Fair & Exhibition Center (2330 17th St. N.E., Salem, Oregon). The event will focus on the emerging trends in the ag industry such as small farming, technology and education. The show coincides with the Salem Area Chamber of Commerce's SAIF Agri-Business Banquet on Friday, January 18 at the Salem Convention Center 200 Commercial St SE, Salem, Oregon. Both events contribute to Ag Week celebrations for the Salem area. For more information, log on to www.nwagshow.com.

JANUARY 9-11, 2019

MANTS

The Mid-Atlantic Nursery Trade Show will be held at the Baltimore Convention Center (One



Northwest News

OAN members and chapters are encouraged to send in relevant news items, such as new hires, new products, acquisitions, honors received and past or upcoming events. Email news@oan.org.

Stone reappointed to SAIF board

Oregon's Senate Committee on Rules has confirmed OAN executive director **Jeff Stone's** reappointment to the **SAIF** board.

SAIF is Oregon's not-for-profit, state-chartered workers' compensation insurance company. SAIF currently insures more than 75 percent of all agricultural operations in the state, and more than 500 nursery industry companies use SAIF as their workers' compensation insurance carrier. SAIF ensures Oregon businesses take care of injured workers, helps people get back to work, and focuses on workplace safety so that there are fewer incidents. This in turn allows for premiums to stay low.

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BAILEY ACQUIRES CARLTON PLANTS

Two major nursery companies with shared Oregon roots are getting back together.

Bailey Nurseries, a Minnesota-based grower with extensive operations in Oregon, has purchased Carlton Plants LLC, which is based in Dayton, Oregon.

Carlton has specialized in high quality bare root trees, shrubs, vines, rootstocks and liners, while Bailey is a large and highly diversified grower of shrubs, trees, perennials and vines in containers, bare root and liners, with several branded product lines and with growing operations in five states.

The sale brings together two companies with a common thread of family ownership — second-generation Bailey owner Gordon Bailey Sr. once also owned Carlton Plants, and appointed his grandson, Jon Bartch, general manager of the company in 1992. Gordon died in 1995 and Bartch purchased Carlton from his



grandfather's estate in 1997.

"Carlton Plants is very fortunate to have so many great employees, customers, and colleagues with whom strong relationships have been developed over the past 128 years," Bartch said. "Carlton remains very strong and healthy because of them. With respect to these rela- ➤

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In Memoriam

EDWARD WALTER SCHULTZ

The OAN is saddened to report the passing of longtime nurseryman Edward Walter Schultz, who owned Calorwash Nursery in Aurora, Oregon and served as OAN president in 1978.

Ed passed away October 2, 2018 in McMinnville, Oregon. He was 98.

He was born September 27, 1920 to Mathias and Martha (Wanzek) Schultz. He was the fifth of nine children. Originally from Windsor, North Dakota, the family moved to Canby, Oregon in 1936 due to the Great Depression and the dust storms. They settled on a farm in Mt. Angel, Oregon two years later.

After graduating from high school, Ed worked in the Portland Shipyards. In 1942, he enlisted in the Navy at age 22. He served as a gunnery mate aboard PT-490 throughout World War II. Postwar, he enrolled at Oregon State College (now University), graduating in 1948 with a degree in horticulture/nursery management. He then completed a master's degree in horticulture at Texas A & M University, with a minor in genetics.

Ed married Helen (Pat) Holmes on September 15, 1946.



They settled with their family in Oregon. Later they founded Calorwash Nursery, using the first few letters of three West Coast states to make a name.

Ed was active in the OAN for many years, serving as president in 1978. He was recognized with the Pacific Coast Nurseryman Outstanding Service Award in 1980, and later was made an OAN Honorary Life Member.

He was well known for teaching others about plant propagation, including a stint teaching at Clackamas Community College.

When not working, Ed enjoyed travel and was a member of the Mazamas outdoor group. He scaled peaks on multiple continents, including Mt. Kenya in Africa and Mt. Popocatepetl in Mexico. In 2010, he assembled his memoirs into a book, "A Warrior's Tale: From World War II to World Traveler." He was also the subject of a feature story in the August 2008 issue of *Digger*.

Ed is survived by his sister, Rita Hudak of Beaverton, Oregon; sons Stanley Schultz of Molalla, Oregon and Wayne Schultz of Garibaldi, Oregon; daughter Barbara Rageh of Orinda, California; four grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren.

Ed was laid to rest at Willamette National Cemetery in Portland. A celebration of his life will take place at 11 a.m. Saturday, December 2, 2018 at St. James Catholic Church, Molalla, Oregon.



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tionships, and as a business owner, there is a responsibility to consider the longer-term future of the company. I am excited to share this future with another relationship-focused organization such as Bailey."

Bailey said the existing history and relationship between the two companies "has laid the foundation for a smooth integration into one organization under the Bailey umbrella."

"We have many common core values, making this a natural fit," Bailey President Terri McEnaney said. "Our joint commitment to service and quality will be a great benefit to our expanded customer and employee base, and we look forward to bringing our teams together to support the long-term success of Bailey and our customers."

With the sale announcement, Bailey said that Bartsch "will remain on board alongside Bailey and Carlton leadership."

"Customers can expect a smooth transition with all 2019 ordering and shipping processes unchanged," the company stated in its release. "During this time, long-term transition plans will be established for the most efficient integration of people and systems."

Bailey was founded in 1905 by John Vincent Bailey in St. Paul, Minnesota, on land the company still farms today. The company expanded to Oregon in 1977 when Don Pond helped them establish field and container operations year the city of Yamhill. Carlton Plants was founded in 1890 in Carlton, Oregon by the Brooks family (including Gene, Kent, Lyle and Lynn, all members of the Oregon Nurseries' Hall of Fame). The company moved its growing operations to Dayton, Oregon in 1971.

Go to www.diggermagazine.com/bailey-carton for more details.

USDA FUNDS PROJECT TO PROMOTE BEE-FRIENDLY PLANTS

A joint project to promote Oregon nurseries and specialty seeds as bee-friendly has been granted \$174,374 in USDA Specialty Crop Block Grant funds. The grant was part of an overall \$1.9 million in USDA funds granted to Oregon projects and announced during the last week of September.

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Northwest News

A European honey bee (*Apis mellifera*) extracts nectar from an Aster flower.

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The project is being undertaken by **Oregon State University** and Oregon Bee Project lead Andony Maletholpuolus in partnership with the Oregon Association of Nurseries (OAN) and the Specialty Seed Growers of Western Oregon (SSGWO). Its components include developing *Bee Protection Protocols*, promoting those protocols to the public, and highlighting seed mixtures and nursery plants that provide forage for season-long benefits to a broad array of pollinators.

OSU will work with OAN to adapt *Bee Protection Protocols* previously developed by the Horticultural Research Institute (HRI) for Oregon producers, research to develop lists of plants commonly grown in Oregon that benefit pollinators, and a marketing strategy to promote the stewardship of the industry and specific plants as *Oregon Bee Project Pollinator Plant Picks*.

Project outcomes are expected to be increased sales of pollinator-friendly plants, enhanced pollinator health, a scaling up of the Oregon Bee Project initiative (which was featured in the August issue of *Digger*), and greater incentives for environmental stewardship for industries that contribute to pollinator health.

For details, download a PDF of the project list at tinyurl.com/ycqar763.

CLARIFICATION

In the October issue of *Digger*, in the article on Grower guidance vs. customer demand, we reported that the Chicago Region Trees Initiative has developed agreements for contract growing. It is true that CRTI is working with landowners and nurseries to set up contracts for growing trees. However, CRTI currently does not have any "large" contracts. We regret the misunderstanding. ☺

The People Issue

IT TAKES A NUMBER of essentials to transform a healthy seed, seedling, cutting or start into a market-ready plant or tree. There's water. Fertilizer. Pest management. Growing media for containerized plants, or healthy soil for those grown in the field.

If any of these are missing or unavailable, the product will suffer or die, but these things by themselves are not enough. Guiding the entire process from start to finish is the one true key ingredient for healthy, market-ready plants.

And that would be people.

It takes people to breed the plants, make the selections, know customer needs, propagate, plant, feed, water, treat, prune, transplant, weed, harvest, market, sell and ship nursery products (and we're sure we missed a few steps).

People like Andres Alamillo.

Andres attended kindergarten in Juarez, Mexico. His father got a student visa to attend college across the Rio Grande in El Paso, Texas, enabling Andres to attend grades 1–6 in that city. The family later moved to Kansas, where Andres developed an unusual curiosity for a high school student. "I took an interest in plants," he said.

He attended Kansas State University and majored in horticulture, with a focus in greenhouse management. Upon graduation, he was offered an internship at **Monrovia's** large nursery operation in Dayton, Oregon.

"I packed up my bed and bags and told my folks, 'I don't think I'm coming back to Kansas,'" he said.

Upon completing the internship, Andres accepted a full-time job there as a crew leader in charge of plant health. He was promoted to an inventory management role, working under Cesar Velazquez. In 2013, he accepted an offer from **Smith Gardens** in Aurora, Oregon to become their new inventory manager.

Through these experiences, he gained an understanding of true leadership. To him, it means being there for the team, understanding their needs, listening to their challenges, helping them problem solve, and taking issues to the managers above him when necessary.

In 2016, Smith Gardens promoted Andres, giving him an entirely new position — that of continuous improvement manager, reporting directly to the CEO. It gave him the opportunity to assist the company's four growing sites on the West Coast with improving their processes.

When he started, his personal impact was on his crew. Today, directly and indirectly, he's helping every employee in all four Smith locations be

more successful.

"I think it's really important for a leader to understand the business and paint a picture for their team," Andres said.

People. That's what it's about.

In Oregon, nurseries and their people ship close to \$1 billion worth of ornamental nursery and greenhouse plants per year. Those plants go everywhere — the United States and worldwide.

That's why you will seldom find a nursery owner or manager who does not appreciate the critical role of employees at every level, from entry-level worker to crew leader, from supervisor to manager, and from senior management to ownership.

They know that nurseries must compete to first, attract top leadership, second, provide an attractive work experience (including compensation) and finally, secure enough labor to keep their operations running.

That's daunting, but many industry leaders see a flip side.

"It's such a great time to get into the industry because there's so much opportunity," said Shane Brockhus, general manager of West Coast operations for **Bailey Nurseries**.

"Everybody is clamoring for that next great person to add to their company." ☈



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BY CURT KIPP

WHEN PEOPLE TALK ABOUT the nursery industry's human resource challenges, they often speak strictly in terms of labor.

But the nursery industry needs people at all levels, from entry-level workers to crew leaders, supervisors, managers and above.

To succeed in a challenging industry, nursery companies rely on the experience, technical knowledge, management ability and leadership skills of top employees. The problem is, those people will eventually retire, take a different job, or resign for other reasons.

Who can replace them? A 2015 study by Purdue University and the U.S. Department of Agriculture predicted that there would not be enough college graduates (bachelor's degree or above) in STEM fields (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) to fill available positions in a variety of fields, including agriculture, between 2015–2020.

Longtime industry leaders such as Art Anderson know what this means.

"I have 70-plus managers here which are foreman and above," said the general manager of **J. Frank Schmidt & Son Co.**, a tree breeder and grower based in Boring, Oregon. "And when I look at the number of people and their age dynamics, we have a lot of retirees coming up in the next five to eight years, many of them in significant positions."

Finding replacements is an industry-wide concern. The development of talent can happen through college training programs and internships. However, it can also

occur internally, within companies, through mentorship and training programs that use internal or external resources. The key is letting people know that opportunities exist and are open to all. Then it is just a matter of finding the right fit for the person and the organization.

Educational pathways

Ryan Contreras and Lloyd Nackley, both professors in the **Oregon State University** horticulture department, know some nurseries are struggling to hire for jobs that require a degree or equivalent knowledge.

"At least four different companies have come to me this summer saying, 'Hey, we'd like to hire someone,'" Nackley said. "And I didn't have anyone. There is a lack of people."

Enrollment is healthy in the department, but according to Nackley, many of the students don't realize nursery is the top-grossing sector in Oregon agriculture.

"I tell students, I can guarantee you a position in the nursery industry," Contreras said. "And because upper management is aging out, I explain it's no longer that they are going to toil away at lower positions for years. There are opportunities to advance in 5–10 years."

OSU offers several curriculum options within the horticulture major. They include plant breeding and genetics, viticulture, landscape and turf, and ecological and sustainable horticultural production. The last option is the most popular, attracting ecologically and organically minded students.



Leadership

Tom Cammarota of Peoria Gardens works on a computer. Opposite Page: Andrea Avila-Aragon of Smith Gardens presents her leadership development board to Salvador Ramirez.



"There's been a misconception about what the nursery industry is," Contreras said. "We're trying to make students understand that these growers are stewards of the land."

The curse (or blessing) of the nursery industry is the diversity of the plants, making the work more difficult than a mono crop.

Nackley sees nursery work as the most diverse horticulture production system. "Students, like many of us, do not know what they want to do for the rest of their life," he said. "So I highlight the variety as opportunity. With nursery you can focus on irrigation, IPM, plant propagation, business management, ag engineering, and not just for one crop. There's something for everyone."

For students who want to dive in, OSU offers a traineeship at the North Willamette Research and Extension Center in Aurora, Oregon. The interns get as many hands-on experiences in one week as students receive in an entire quarter of lab classes, and the internship lasts for 8-12 weeks.

"It's an incredibly intensive learning experience," Nackley said. "And it's in an academic space, where you can make mistakes without the bottom line impact of a production environment."

The search for talent

Of course, nurseries don't just hire college graduates, but professionals with all levels of experience. Mark Buchholz, president of **Skagit Horticulture**, a grower based in Mount Vernon, Washington, leaves no stone unturned in looking for them.

"We have a strong HR presence in our office," he said. "We're tapped into the community and promote opportunities to our employees. We pay finder's fees and retention fees to employees to stay through the season. We advertise in the papers. We work with staffing agencies. We work with local employers' organizations and chambers of commerce."

Smith Gardens, headquartered in Bellingham, Washington with four West Coast locations, likewise casts a wide net.

"Growers are more challenging to find out there with the experience that you're

looking for," said Wes Bailey, general manager of the company's Aurora, Oregon location. "We'll reach across the country. When we advertise, we're not just targeting in one marketplace."

Digger's employment ads are published monthly and updated immediately online at www.diggermagazine.com/jobs

Linda Eshraghi, owner of **Eshraghi Nurseries** wholesale operation in Beaverton, Oregon, as well as a retail arm, **Farmington Gardens**, has had the best results through networking. "Pretty much everyone I've hired has been referred to me by somebody I trust," she said.

The difficulty of filling positions means the nursery industry can't afford to overlook good candidates, regardless of gender, cultural background or other characteristics. That hasn't always happened in the workplace, and the nursery industry is no different.

Eshraghi remembers when she first started out working for Glenn Walters Nursery during the 1970s. The first week, her supervisor didn't want a woman working in propagation and told her she should go be a cashier at Safeway. "That just made me dig in deeper," she said.

Nursery co-founder Viola Walters took Eshraghi under her wing and gave her opportunities. She soon became a roving troubleshooter for the company that then owned the nursery. They sent her to other locations in California and South Carolina. Viola's mentorship helped Linda realize her potential.

Andrea Avila-Aragon, shipping manager for Smith Gardens, encountered discrimination more recently, in her native country.

"In Costa Rica, the horticultural area of study is a man's study," she said. "It was 95 percent male when I went to university, and I was also a single mom. I was a minority within a minority."

She worked in ornamental horticulture there for 13 years, advancing to the position of general manager. It took creativity

to overcome the obstacles. "All my customers were male, all my coworkers were male, and all the people who reported to me were male," she said.

Smith Gardens hired her as a selecting supervisor after she moved to the United States with her husband and children. A year later, they promoted her to shipping manager.

According to Buchholz, companies must make a conscious decision to consider all candidates, or they will miss out on people who can help them.

"The whole idea of diversity begins with thoughtfulness," he said. "You will find companies where most of the supervisors are Anglo. You can find companies where half are Hispanic. It comes from an intentional decision that these positions are open to everybody. Not everybody understands that. Quotas don't have anything to do with it. Is it good for our business? That's where it needs to be."

Leveling people up

With graduates not filling all needs, and outside candidates difficult to find, many companies are turning to a third source of talent: current employees.

By consistently finding training opportunities for their workers, companies can add more layers of talent, skill, experience and wisdom to their current roster, thereby growing their own farm team of strong candidates for promotion.

Shane Brockhus, general manager of West Coast operations for **Bailey Nurseries**, looks for people who are ready for more responsibility and mentors them.

"This industry and this company, it's not for everybody," he said. "The people who really enjoy it and value it can make a really great career out of it, and those are the people we want to tap. Some people, you just have to give them an opportunity and they'll surprise you."

Wes Bailey, of Smith Gardens, does the same and wants people to know the opportunities exist. "When people come and ask if there's opportunity for promotion and growth from within, I like to have five or six

different examples at my fingertips," he said.

Smith Gardens has enhanced its focus on formal, internal training programs. The company is developing a "training library" for leads, supervisors and managers. The material covers non-technical subjects, such as communication, email and how to manage difficult employees. The company also offers regular English classes for entry-level workers, giving them a skill they must have if they want to advance.

After overcoming obstacles in her career path, Avila-Aragon now wants to help others. She considers the development of people a crucial part of her job. In looking for future leaders, she identifies workers who display a willingness to learn, knowledge of company processes, and respect for people.



A whiteboard in her office is labeled "leadership development." She updates it regularly with goals, strategies and challenges for her employees.

"I want them to be able to plan a new season without me," she said. "It's not that I want them to take my job, but I want them to not need me. I want them to be in charge, on their own, independent."

Often, the people she wants to promote have a gap in leadership skills. Using a questionnaire, she tries to identify typical workplace situations they are comfortable with.

For example, she asks if the employee would feel comfortable telling their supervisor, manager or even company owner they are wrong about something. "Where I get the no's, I know what I have to focus on," she said.

Her coworker, Andres Alamillo, serves as Smith's continuous improvement manager, and is in charge of implementing Lean at all locations. Lean principles require giving employees a voice in problem solving, and participating in creating solutions prepares the employees for better things.

"We're in the business of change, and that's daily," Alamillo said. "It's not just your customers (you serve), it's your people."

Another path to finding outside talent is internships. Several Oregon nurseries ➤



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Leadership

Raphael Calderon of JLPN removes samara wings from a batch of seeds.



offer them. Many are listed on the OAN website at www.oan.org/interns.

Bailey is one. Their West Coast operation works with at least two interns per season, each for three to six months.

"They come in and work in every single department we have," Brockshus said. "It gives them the chance to experience everything: inventory, all stages of shipping, transplanting, production, the growing team, plant management, irrigation and pest management."

Taking employee development a step further, J. Frank Schmidt & Son Co. has invested in a formal management trainee program for people who can help the company long term. It is available to candidates with college degrees, nursery experience or both. Candidates are recruited from all over the country.

"We started the management training program to identify people who have the potential to work their way through our organization, and have the capacity and ability to advance over a number of years," Anderson said.

Trainees are chosen through a rigorous process and given experience in all aspects of the operations at the company's six different farms.

"Eight have gone through the program in the last six years," Anderson said. "Seven completed it successfully, and six have been placed in midlevel management or above. It's been good for us, and they're gaining experience so that when retirements happen, or people leave unexpectedly, we have a reserve bank of talent and experience." ☈



Working wonders

Despite pervasive labor struggles, nurseries find ways to find workers

BY JON BELL

THERE WAS A TIME, up until 2006 or 2007, when **Robinson Nursery** in McMinnville, Oregon would lay off at least 30 percent of its workforce every year, just after the fall season and heading into winter. Back then, the nursery industry's labor pool included a significant amount of migrant workers, and the business itself was much more seasonal than it is today.

Then, of course, the recession hit.

When the economy and the industry finally rebounded after that, the labor scene had changed. Many workers left the business when the work scaled back. Nurseries — those who survived the downturn — had grown lean and more efficient. They revamped their strategies and tailored their inventories; some turned to mechanization. But they still needed workers, especially as demand ramped up again.

That pinch — exacerbated by the lack of federal immigration reform — has persisted, and it's hampered the industry as a whole.

"Finding labor seems to be what's inhibiting growth," said Chris Robinson, general manager of Robinson Nursery.

The labor struggle continues for nurseries in Oregon and elsewhere, but people are figuring it out. From shifting to more full-time, year-round employees — Robinson Nursery now has 100 full-timers and just 14 seasonal workers — and finding new places and new people to recruit, to tapping a little deeper into

the H-2A guest worker program and keeping the pressure on lawmakers to enact reform, the nursery industry is adapting and coming up with ways to meet its labor needs.

"We'd all like to get more," Robinson said, "and I think we need to work together to find a long-term solution, because what we're doing right now is just a Band-Aid."

Short supply

According to the Oregon Employment Department, employment in nursery and floriculture production in the state had a seasonal peak at just over 14,000 workers in November 2007. The next year, it shed about 1,400 workers and steadily dropped over the ensuing years to around an average of 10,500 workers every November before a sizable seasonal drop-off.

The lowest point came in January 2012, when the number hit 7,300.

Though a shortage of workers has long plagued the nursery industry, the economic downturn greatly exacerbated the problem, pushing nurseries to play the catchup game when the economy and demand came back to life.

Other factors have contributed to the shortage, as well, including the aging of the agricultural workforce, an exodus of workers during the recession and the continued stalemate at the federal level to enact meaningful immigration reform.



Labor

Benjamin Miranda of JLPN gathers seeds.



"When we talk about what keeps our folks up at night, the availability of labor is huge," said Jeff Stone, executive director of the Oregon Association of Nurseries. "And a big part of what we're seeing is the downside of 30 years of inaction by our Congress. It's been a deteriorating process for well over three decades."

The most recent failure on lawmakers' part came earlier this year with the sinking of legislation introduced by U.S. Rep. Bob Goodlatte (R-Virginia), which, among other provisions, would have created a new visa program for foreign workers and required mandatory E-Verify usage to determine a worker's legal eligibility to work in the U.S. Certain provisions of the bill met stiff opposition from different sides.

"No immigration bill is going to be perfect," Stone said. "There's always something that is going to irritate someone. It's either going to be too restrictive or too permissive."

Tom Fessler, co-owner of **Woodburn Nursery & Azaleas** of Woodburn, Oregon, said legislation that creates a smooth process for foreign workers to come and work in the U.S. would go a long way to easing the industry's struggles with labor.

"I've said it forever: We need a work authorization program for people who want to come in and work but who don't want to become citizens," he said, noting that Woodburn Nursery has refrained from using existing guest worker programs.

The federal H2-A Visa program already does create at least one pathway for foreign workers to come into the U.S., work and then head back home — legally. But it hasn't caught on in Oregon or on the West Coast as much as it has elsewhere.

"It works better in the South and in some parts of the Midwest because there's a smaller window for the activity there, and they are temporary workers," Stone said. "Reliance on H2-A in the West doesn't work and it's not smart."

Dan Fazio is executive director of **WAFLA**, a farm labor association in Lacey, Washington, that helps farmers find workers through the H2-A program. He said WAFLA currently has more than 18,000 H2-A visas

in Washington, but just 1,000 in Oregon; most of those in Oregon are for farms, with just a handful of nurseries. Part of the discrepancy, he said, comes from the lack of state support for the program.

"Oregon has — and this just baffles me — been hostile to the program," Fazio said. "It baffles me because it's well regulated and the workers love it."

Another factor is that it's easier for agriculture workers in Oregon along the I-5 corridor to string together year-round, full-time work — going from Christmas trees in the winter to nurseries in the spring, followed by berries and hops in the summer and back to nurseries in the fall — than it is for those who work out in eastern Washington, where the crop diversity is more limited.

Moving to year-round work

Offering full-time, year-round work is one way that a lot of Oregon nurseries are meeting their labor needs these days. It's more appealing to members of today's workforce, who aren't necessarily looking to move from crop to crop with the season.

"More people want to put roots down and be a part of the community," Stone said.

Robinson said that his nursery used to do all of its field planting in the spring. Now, as a way to offer year-round work, it does about a third of its planting in the fall. About half of Robinson Nursery is also a container farm, and these days half of that is in greenhouses, which also gives workers the opportunity to stay on throughout the winter months.

"I also think there are just not as many (migrants) coming and going from Mexico anymore," Robinson said of the less migratory nature of the contemporary workforce. "It's harder to do now."

Ben Verhoeven, president and general manager of **Peoria Gardens** in Albany, Oregon, said his operation has about 25

Previous page: Joe McNally (left) & Zac Burke-Wolfe (right) of Peoria Gardens prepare an order of mums. Opposite page: Oliver Gracia of JLPN smiles in the field.

year-round employees and about 30 to 40 in the peak spring season. They used to have a steady stream of folks dropping in to seek work, but these days, they have to be more proactive. That's meant placing ads online and working closely with Linn Benton Community College and Oregon State University.

"I think it really helps that we are close to and have good relationships with the local community college and the university," Verhoeven said, "because that opens up a lot of potential employees who are interested and hard-working. That's been a really big part of our seasonal pool, but we know not all nurseries live within reach of resources like that."

He said Peoria Gardens also dabbled with hiring high school students for a time, but their schedules weren't as conducive to what the nursery needed. In addition, Verhoeven said Peoria prides itself on offering competitive pay as well as a handsome benefits package, both of which help attract and retain employees. Benefits that start to kick in after employees' first year: four weeks of paid vacation, a week of paid sick leave, health and dental care, a pension and a 401(k).

"And frankly," Verhoeven said, "we have a good group of people who are fun to work with. All those sorts of benefits, to a potential employee, speak volumes about the kind of company they are hoping to work for."

At Woodburn Nursery, Fessler said they, too, offer competitive wages and benefits. And while that helps find good people, there's no doubt it's driven up costs.

What else could be done to help ease the nursery industry's labor woes remains to be seen. Work will continue on the lobbying and legislative front for some kind of immigration reform that might help. The continued evolution of the industry into a year-round one, could also make it more convenient for workers to be employed year-round instead of on a seasonal basis. Mechanization and efficiency will likely help as well, making each independent effort a part of the bigger, long-term labor solution.

"It's always a challenge, up there with weather, pests and disease," Robinson said, "But we are all farmers, so we figure it out." ☈



The essentials of retention

BY BILL GOLOSKI



MANY GROWERS CAN'T SET the price of their products in the national marketplace. They are competing for business with growers from states that don't have same high cost of doing business, which puts Oregonians at a competitive disadvantage.

This means business owners must focus on collecting high-value returns on high-cost labor expenses.

When compiling salaries and benefit packages to offer their staff, experienced hiring managers strive to balance the things they can influence while following the government-enforced employment laws they can't control.

Staffing needs

The nursery and greenhouse industry is in a tight bind to find enough laborers to get their projects done. Each operation has their list of hard-to-find laborers.

John Lewis, president of **JLPN Inc.** in Salem, Oregon, owns a seedling business that produces between 8–10 million plants a year. His payroll will average about 35 people for the majority of the year; keep-

ing a full-time crew of 25, and hiring up to 60 employees for peak season.

Lewis states hiring a bulk group of people to work for 1–4 months at a time is the most challenging staffing issue he faces. "You're not looking for somebody with an extensive list of skills, just somebody who can grade trees, plant seed, or make cuttings," Lewis said.

Kathy LeCompte, owner of **Brooks Tree Farm**, also states that finding seasonal workers is challenging, typically for digging up trees. "Just like everyone else," she begins, "we are forced to take just about anyone willing to work outside and only turn away those that look like obvious problems."

She started her family business, Brooks Tree Farm, with her husband Dave in 1980. They grow and sell with more than 5 million trees a year on spread across 200 acres of land on seven small farms across Marion County, Oregon. They need 30 employees throughout the year; hiring 75 seasonal employees to handle peak season.

As an example of hard times,

LeCompte shared a story from three years ago, where two back-to-back winters with very heavy rain left Brooks Tree Farm in a bad spot.

"That year bordered on emergency," LeCompte said. The winter gave Oregon pounding rain all week, and breaks in the weather only seemed to appear on Sundays — when employees wanted time off. The company had little choice left but to hire multiple contractors to do all the digging that needed to get done.

The staffing solution ended up backfiring.

The temporary staffers were compensated through contract, which was very different format than their year-over-year employees.

"Suddenly, very expensive and very low-quality employees bragged to our long-term people they were getting a better deal, which caused rifts and unexpected costly adjustments mid-budget," LeCompte said.

Lewis adds that the type of labor he's looking for is the same as many other businesses. The pool of inter-



Benefits

This page: Carlos Vargara, lean manager at JLPN, shows the Lean process board by the water station. Opposite page: Melissa Giancola of Peoria Gardens waters plants.

ested candidates is not only shrinking in size, but the candidates themselves are the typically the same individuals.

"You might fill the positions, but then you start losing people a couple here and a couple there to fruit growers, firefighting, or canneries," Lewis said.

In other unfulfilled positions, Ben Verhoeven, president of **Peoria Gardens** Inc. in Linn County, Oregon finds that seasonal transportation positions are difficult to fill.

His bedding plant nursery produces annuals, perennials, vegetable starts, herbs and hanging baskets for the wholesale trade. The business employs 25 full-time, year-round staff members, and will take on about 30 more in peak season for trucking, order pulling, and transplanting.

Sweetening the deal

With employees so difficult to find the issue of retention becomes critical. That includes wages, benefits and intangibles.

Wage rates can often be straightforward, but Verhoeven takes a long-term, strategic approach to offering a benefits package. "It typically takes a year of careful consideration before introducing a new benefit or changing an existing one," he said. "Once you add a benefit it is very difficult to remove it in the future."

His company hires less people than Brooks Tree Farm or JLPN, stating, "We like to say we are a family farm that supports families." Maintaining a healthy work-life balance is essential to the company's culture.

Peoria Garden's benefits package offers extremely generous benefits, such as 12 weeks of full pay parental leave, and four weeks of paid vacation.

"The result is a workforce with low turnover that is more stable, less stressed, and more engaged," Verhoeven said. These benefits are more valuable to some staff than hourly wages or salary rates.

LeCompte's company offers lots of other incentives that add up to a good value, too. "We provide a soccer field and allow



access to our 'stuff,' such as tables and chairs for personal parties," she said. "Employees can talk to the company mechanic for help with car trouble, or use equipment to move to new apartments or houses — such as the company pickup, trailer, and boxes."

Bonus benefits

At the end of the day, however, nice perks don't always pay the bills.

"I realized several years ago that being competitive as an employer was going to be as essential as being competitive with products and pricing," Lewis said. "It all comes down to money."

Lewis understands from a higher level that compensation rates need to be proportionate to the employee's responsibilities and dedication to the business's success. Just shelling out more money isn't an investment strategy when business owners don't measure their returns.

"The question was how to deliver and compensate in a way that was financially beneficial to the employee, while also creating accountability on the employees' side, so I knew that they are looking out for my best interest," Lewis said.

JLPN offers an annual bonus to employees if they have been with the company for more than one year. The value of the bonus is proportionate to the company's performance for that time period. "Simply stated, if JLPN makes a larger margin, bonuses are larger, and the opposite holds true as well," Lewis said.

It engages staff to think beyond their daily duties. If employees stop and think of waste elimination so the company can create a more significant profit margin, they will recognize that inefficiencies are the only thing standing in their way of large bonuses and wage increase.

Regulations

When the legislature gets involved with employment laws, job applicants are now applying with revised expectations. A

clear example is minimum wage.

"Nobody starts at minimum wage anymore,"

Lewis said.

Jeff Stone, executive director of the Oregon Association of Nurseries, spends a lot of time in the Capitol building, talking about the impact that government regulations impose on agricultural businesses.

Stone repeats the message that the nursery industry is tethered to two things: a market that growers are not able to set the price on to cover for added costs, and a pool quality craftsman with select knowledge and skills that must be retained.

"In isolation, we understand why a legislator supports certain workforce policies," Stone begins, "but there is a cumulative impact that goes on we need to give them experience with."

2016's Oregon Senate Bill 1532 mandated an incremental minimum wage increase over a six-year period. It did not start out as incremental — facing a potential well-funded ballot measure, the initial proposal had a wage rate of \$15 per hour starting the following January. As it moved forward, the bill dictated that wage rate increases were based on the region of the state the employee was working.

Many OAN members already pay above minimum wage, offer paid sick time and paid time off in their employee benefits, so regulations like these take the luster out of working in a nursery. Oregon already has one of the highest minimum wages in the country. It also forces the regularity of wage compression, where brand new employees make more than experienced ones.

Additionally, the bill showed an inherent misunderstanding that nurseries routinely ship products across the state.

"Nurseries would have had to GPS-track delivery drivers who start their day out in the rural areas and make deliveries into Portland," Stone said. Micromanaging the movement of their drivers and pay them incrementally by their location is a labor-intensive demand.

Stone and the agricultural commu-



nity made these burdens known. The Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries released clarifying language to a nursery can simply pay them at the rate of the highest minimum wage of any region they worked during that pay period.

Another example is Senate Bill 454 of 2015, or Oregon Sick Time law, which required all employees to implement paid sick leave for all employees.

Forcing businesses to pay sick leave was a huge change. "It comes out to about five paid sick days, which is a mandated cost we've never had in the state of Oregon before," said Elizabeth Remley, partner at Thorn Run Partners and lobbyist for the Oregon Association of Nurseries.

Besides the forced financial burden

to employers, the regulation manifested into a significant amount of paperwork; because you have to count employees the way the state counts them for compliance reasons. If a business employed more than 10 people — or more than six within Portland city limits — owners had to pay them at their regular pay rate.

For family businesses that recruit any available hands in the household at crunch time, this was an expensive law.

Clarifying language was needed. "We were able to get family members exempted," Remley said, "And, if you have an equivalent or better sick leave policy, you don't have to follow adopt the mandated rules."

OAN reviews hundreds of bills that impact the workplace each session. "There are countless bills that could have a devastating impact on the industry," said Stone. Thankfully, we are able to work hard so that the membership never has to worry about it. If they saw what was coming — anger would turn into panic."

Paid family leave regulations are coming up for 2019, which will come into play for a nursery's ability to be competitive for the markets. For that discussion, Stone will be sharing the reality that nurseries are facing.

"The OAN is the best place for businesses and legislators to meet," said Stone. "They can get out to a nursery, see how it works firsthand, and meet the people." ☈

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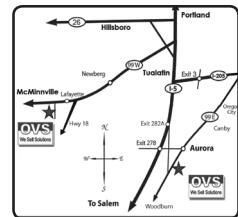


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EMPLOYMENT

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- Create and oversee labor and expense budgets.

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EMPLOYMENT

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The 'tangled root ball'

Family-owned businesses must balance work, ownership and family roles

BY SHERRI NOXEL

Each June, family business owners interview with a panel of peers to compete in the Excellence in Family Business Awards.

Judges consistently ask each CEO how they carve out time for their family. To date, the most memorable — and perhaps practical — “policy” came from a father with three very accomplished sons. He replied, “If my boys and I start talking about business at the house, my wife will take away our alcohol.”

Talking about the business, even after the long workday has ended, is an occupational hazard of running a family business. Every family has a unique way to implement their self-imposed rule to shift from business to family concerns.

Aside from preserving cocktail privileges, focusing on the family not only strengthens relationships but can also have positive benefits for the business in the long run. The challenge is to recognize how your many roles blend together and can lose the balance of the family to the urgency of the business.

Distinct but overlapping roles

Family business has been described as “one big root ball,” with tangled boundaries making it unclear where the business ends and the family begins. However, around each family business is a system of three distinct but overlapping roles: owner, business and family.

Defining and then distinguishing personal responsibilities as a president (business), a shareholder (owner) and as



Chris Shonnard, co-founder of Shonnards Nursery Floral and Landscape, is shifting his business responsibilities to the next generation and found time to meet with OSU family business students on campus.

a parent (family) is typically the first step to untangle the root ball and achieve the clarity needed to prepare plans or solve conflicts. Each role has unique responsibilities that together build a foundation of a united family ownership for generations.

In this overarching system family and nonfamily employees with responsibilities in the business are part of the business circle. Their roles encompass production, employee recruitment and training, accounting and the operational functions. Upper management leaders make decisions and policy, based on input from all levels of operations that are communicated throughout the business.

Members in the ownership circle are shareholders who may or may not work in the business. Owners share responsibilities for determining the strategic direction and capitalization of the business, succession

planning and hiring the best leadership team to execute the strategy. Regular and formal meetings of shareholder groups, boards of directors or advisory boards monitor business performance and assess external advice to steward the enterprise. Even in smaller first generation operations the president, who may be the sole owner, will acknowledge the importance of working “on the business, not just in the business.”

The family circle of the system includes the blood relatives of the owners as well as spouses. All of the branches are recognized on this broader view of family because of the demands and stresses that a business can place on a family. There are more opportunities for conflict and misunderstanding.

The benefit of meetings dedicated to building family unity is evident in many business families. Developing a forum ➤

The 'tangled root ball'

to share family histories and business updates and where families learn and play together creates stronger bonds.

The overlap of these roles was evident in one Willamette Valley family business. Among two generations of owners in a small service firm, the succession plan was amicably discussed, documented and signed. However, Dad never left his position when the retirement transition was scheduled. The business was stressed because Dad was less attentive to the customers and other managers were picking up the slack.

A year later the shareholders asked their consultant to return for conversations about this unexpected turn of events. It turned out that Dad was willing to retire but Mom, who enjoyed years as a community organizer, delayed his departure. She feared losing her civic leader-

status if Dad stepped down from the business. In other words, Mom was uncomfortable with the transition and what it would mean for her.

Fortunately, the owners had implemented a forum for succession planning, allowing them to realize that the impact on all family members needed to be considered. Once Mom's concerns were recognized, the family was able to support her interest in maintaining a civic leadership role even after her nephew officially became the company president.

Looking for balance

Defining your roles is a way to monitor how you balance each. Differentiating your roles as CEO, shareholder, or parent can have lasting effects to both your family harmony and your business bottom line. In fact, there is a strong business case

for more family in the balance of your life.

Using family time to strengthen connections to next generation family members builds the human capital of the family. Tensions and late nights in the office leave lasting negative impressions. Children will be more willing to consider the business in their career choices if they observe a balance in work obligations and family engagement. Human capital, with strong relationships, harmony and trust, provides a foundation of respect for the company and the willingness to make sacrifices if needed.

A central Oregon family company board chair felt that the time spent building family relationships was a key contributor to the family's decision to proceed with a complicated lawsuit. The young generation members were passing up dividends for the long-term success of the company. The chair was impressed with the commitment of the young generation, particularly because they didn't work in the business and the cash would be useful for home down payments and student loan debt.

Estate attorneys have advised, "You never really know someone until you share an inheritance." Time with your children and family members dedicated to sharing your religious faith, values, sacrifices and wishes can minimize future misunderstandings. Your succession and estate planning decisions and the potentially difficult inheritance conversations have a greater chance of being understood and accepted if children have developed trusting relationships with the family members in the system.

If you feel you may be at risk for losing your business, owner and family balance, here are ideas for keeping the family prominent in your schedule.

- **Structure mandatory downtime or family meals into your schedule.** In one founder's retail company these planned weeknight evenings are affectionately known as "Forced Family Fun." Another couple developed their personal policy to end all business conversation by 9 p.m.
- **Unplug from emails and set aside**

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screens during the family time. Email auto responses can help. An OSU College of Business course instructor automatically schedules an afterhours email reply that notes he typically doesn't read email after 6 p.m. at night "to spend more time with my family."

- Beware of the industry trade show substituting for a family vacation. If you are bringing the family, and many family business students count trade shows as an important experience in their professional education, take time away from the corporate hospitality for your family.

- Take vacations as often as feasible. When Calvin and Debbie Kearns started C & D Landscape Company they scheduled every Fourth of July as the Kearns Family Holiday. My personal habit is to decide my next vacation before I finish my current vacation.

- Explore philanthropic service projects to connect the generations and support important social causes in the community.

- Make birthdays and wedding anniversaries exclusively about family. These milestones are family-centered reasons to enjoy special meals, capture portraits and celebrate the people behind the business.

If these ideas don't seem feasible and more help is needed, then call on your other CEO — your "chief emotional officer."

In every family there is a family CEO who keeps everyone connected, stewards the history, and values harmony more than most. They are considered leaders of the family circle and they may or may not be involved in the business. Seek out your family's leader for insights on keeping the balance between business and family.

All businesses require attention to be successful. Family businesses demand thoughtful stewardship of the business, the shareholders and the family. Loosening the root ball to define opportunities for balance secures the future of the company. ☺

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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. ©



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