

MEET THE LEADER

The voices of Oregon's nursery industry

TELL US ABOUT YOURSELF.

I grew up in a family fully immersed in the nursery industry. My parents own Simmitt Nursery, a wholesale plant nursery in Canby, Oregon that specializes in rhododendrons and *Pieris*. As a kid I saw my dad go to Oregon Association of Nurseries (OAN) meetings, get involved with the different boards — and I remember how my family always looked forward to the OAN Clackamas Chapter's Christmas parties. When I was young, it felt like a special privilege to go with my parents to the Farwest Show every year and see all of their friends and business partners. Currently, I run the office at Columbia Nursery LLC in Canby, Oregon. My husband, Wayne Staehely, founded the nursery in 2005, and we grow field- and container-grown Japanese maples and rare conifers. It is a great opportunity to stay involved with the people and industry I grew up with, as well as introduce my three children to this wonderful lifestyle.

WHAT'S YOUR GUIDING PRINCIPLE?

We strive to make our nursery a family affair. With three kids ranging in ages between 9 months and 5 years old, it is important for us to involve all of them in our nursery activities as much as possible. We want them to grow up knowing that the amount of time and care that you put into something — such as a plant, for example — can be rewarding. Right now, they are more interested in riding tractors and catching frogs, but I am sure we will get there.

WHAT'S THE BEST BUSINESS DECISION YOU'VE EVER MADE?

I believe that one of our best decisions was purchasing our current property, previously known as Steve Germany Nursery Inc. The opportunity to take over their location came up after we had already made some significant financial decisions. We were young entrepreneurs that had just settled into our first location and had even expanded the infrastructure of the operation. Plus, we were also going through some big life changes that



Amanda Staehely

Office Manager

Columbia Nursery LLC

OAN member since 2009

- Clackamas Chapter past president
- OAN board of directors.

included a big house remodel and the birth of our first son. It was the hardest financial decision for us to make as a new family business, but it was ultimately the best decision.

WHO IS YOUR MOST SIGNIFICANT MENTOR?

One of my greatest mentors in this industry is obviously my dad, Jerry Simmitt. He has answered so many questions about the ins and outs of this line of work. I have also learned a lot from him as I have become more involved with the OAN. He really values the work of the nonprofit trade association. He has enjoyed all of his different roles throughout his time there and has helped me get involved with my own board work. Another huge mentor would be my mom, Roberta. She manages the office at their nursery, so I have taken advantage of her expertise in all of my office practices. I feel like I call her almost daily, whether it is about bookkeeping, shipping documents, or even just parenting advice. Her help is immeasurable.

WHAT IS YOUR GREATEST CHALLENGE?

My greatest challenge is definitely learning all of our plants' scientific names. These plants are so different from the ones I grew up with and I have had a hard time. And so many varieties can look the same! I am learning ... Aside from that, it is a huge challenge to run a nursery business while juggling our kids' schedules and still have quality family time.

WHAT MOTIVATES YOU TO GO TO WORK EVERYDAY?

My husband motivates me to go to work every day because I see how much he loves it. He wants the nursery to grow and continue to succeed, which motivates me to learn the plant material, go through orders in the rain, or work through what is needed.

WHAT DO YOU LOVE MOST ABOUT THE NURSERY INDUSTRY?

What I love most about the nursery industry is the people. When my husband was starting out, so many people came to his aid. They all wanted to help him succeed. What other industry is like that? I also love raising our kids in this kind of lifestyle — it's one that seems hard to find these days.

WHAT ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF?

I am the most proud of how hard my husband had to work when starting the nursery. We entered this industry in the middle of the Great Recession and had to work extremely hard to make it through. We both had multiple jobs and would come home and work until late in the evening on the nursery.

IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT ARE THE MOST CRITICAL CHALLENGES FACING THE NURSERY INDUSTRY TODAY?

It is hard to find a good and consistent labor force that is economical. I don't know what the answer is, but something has to change soon. New statewide regulations are also stressful and they have a huge potential to cripple small businesses like ours. ☺