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Lending our future a hand

The nursery industry as a whole is mutually supportive.

We help each other out. There is always someone willing to assist a fellow nursery or talk with someone looking to start a career in this great industry.

One of the ways Oregon Association of Nurseries members help each year is to promote horticultural education through the Oregon Nursery Foundation (ONF). The foundation was formed in 1976 and started to build an endowment for scholarships to distribute to students. Many OAN families and individuals have also set up scholarships in their names through the ONF. This is a lasting way to help future generations of horticulture students.

In the last 30 years alone, there have been 275 student recipients. Many have gone on to become nursery industry leaders. They have given back by serving on committees and boards within the OAN. I was fortunate enough to be a scholarship recipient in the late '90s. The funds helped me pay tuition for my horticulture degree at Oregon State University.

More recently, the cost of higher education has skyrocketed. According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, the average college tuition has increased 37% since 2008. There are many components that play into this increase, but a major factor is that the cost burden has shifted from federal and states paying less to public institutions.

About 30 years ago, students were only expected to cover 25% of the true cost of getting an education at a public university, with state and federal governments picking up the rest. Today, these governments have reduced this investment in an educated and skilled workforce, and student tuition must now cover 50% of the costs of an education.

So where do individuals and families go for help with educational costs? Scholarships are one important resource. The average family will use scholarships and grants to cover about 31% of tuition costs.

Since the 1990s, the ONF has given out more than \$330,000 to deserving students. The ONF makes 19 different scholarships available to qualified students who have an academic focus on horticulture. Many OAN chapters will sponsor a scholarship that may give preference to their geographical area. Other specific scholarships may give preference to a particular level of studies, such as graduate-level studies.

The ONF Scholarship Committee does an excellent job of combing through the applications and matching deserving students to the appropriate scholarship award. These awards don't just go to regional universities or specific horticulture departments. Within the last 30 years, students who received these awards have attended 40 different colleges. These scholarships can be used at any accredited educational institution, public or private university, community college, or trade school where the student can study either horticulture or related fields that impact our industry.

Now is the time for students to plan ahead for next year and get applications in. The ONF scholarship deadline is April 15. If you would like more information on ONF scholarships or the application, log on to www.oan.org/onfapply, or contact ONF staff liaison Stephanie Weihrauch at sweihrauch@oan.org.

The Oregon Nursery Foundation wants to encourage and support the students who will be the next leaders of our industry. ☺



Jim Simnitt
OAN PRESIDENT

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