

# MEET THE LEADER

The voices of Oregon's nursery industry

## TELL US ABOUT YOURSELF

My love for plants is part of my family's heritage. Starting with my great grandfather, my family has held 640 acres of row crop farmland in the Imperial Valley of California for four generations. In 1975, I began my first nursery and landscaping job in White City, Oregon. This was when nursery containers were metal #10 cans painted black, and grower flats were made of wood.

In high school, I took horticulture classes and worked in various jobs that helped grow the state's agricultural industry — including pear orchards for Harry and David's, plywood mills for Georgia Pacific, and local construction. I graduated from the University of Oregon in 1981 with a bachelor of science degree in sociology and started work at U.S. Bank. However, it was not until I managed a Sherwin Williams Paint Company store on Broadway in Portland that I really learned how to work with profit and loss (P&L) statements and balance sheets.

Then while working on a fund raiser for Lou Gehrig's disease (ALS), I became good friends with Bob Iwasaki of Tanasacres Nursery. The Iwasaki family — owners of the nursery — asked me to bring my work ethic to their operation, and this lured me back into agriculture. For 17 years I worked at the greenhouses on everything from deliveries, shipping, to running sales. In 2007, I switched to the supply side of our industry and joined The McConkey Co. After three years, I was hired on at Myers Lawn and Garden, which is now called The HC Companies. Since then I have sold greenhouse and nursery containers to growers in the mountain states and Pacific Northwest.

## WHAT'S YOUR GUIDING PRINCIPLE?

A friend is a gift you give yourself.

## WHAT'S A GOAL YOU HAVE YET TO ACHIEVE?

I want to travel the world with my wife, Heidi Brewer. For the past 13 years at HC Companies and McConkey, I have traveled the West Coast quite extensively, sometimes up to 75% of my total work time. I've learned a lot from those experiences. So, my dream is



## Tom Brewer District Sales Manager

HC Companies  
OAN member since 1991

- 1991-2010 Greenhouse Chapter
- 2010-2013 Sunset Chapter
- 2013-2020 Clackamas Chapter
- OAN 2013 "Distinguished Member of the Horticultural Allied Trades Industry" Award

### OAN roles/positions:

- OAN Board of Directors, 2013–present (current Associate Member representative)
- Member, Government Relations Committee, 2013–present
- President, Clackamas Chapter, 2014
- Vice chair, Government Relations Committee, 2016–2017
- Chairman, Oregon Nurseries' Political Action Committee, 2019–present

to pick up a car in some European city and go exploring, away from the tourist attractions.

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

Staying right here in Oregon, I would say, has been my best business decision. Developing a network of customers, coworkers, and industry peers who are also good friends has been great. Learning about the many interesting aspects of our industry from raw materials, supply chain inputs, miscellaneous supply, all the way through to the beloved finished plants is definitely a plus, big time.

## HARDEST BUSINESS DECISION

Letting people go at the end of the season.

## GREATEST MISSED OPPORTUNITY

Microsoft stock purchase.

## WHO IS YOUR MOST SIGNIFICANT MENTOR?

My father, was a remarkable man who made good friendships wherever he went. Dad would introduce himself, "Hello, I'm Fitz Brewer from Medford, Oregon." He was just crazy for Oregon, and always talked about how grateful he was to live in such a great place. He started out as a food broker who eventually became a stockbroker in Southern Oregon.

He dedicated much of his life to following *The Four Agreements*, a Toltec wisdom book written by Don Miguel Ruiz. It teaches us to 1) be impeccable with your word, 2) don't take anything personally, 3) don't make assumptions, and 4) always do your best. I use these ideas to achieve my personal sense of excellence each day.

## BEST BUSINESS ADVICE:

A long time ago, I received the sage advice: "Never burn a bridge." I've cycled through a few positions throughout my career, looking for new opportunities all along the way. No matter how frustrating things got, I learned how important it was to maintain the relationships I started. If I gave my employer advanced notice that I found a job, it works like a safety net. If circumstances change — which they do often — I could stay afloat with the other connections I had made.

## WHAT DO YOU LOVE MOST ABOUT THE NURSERY INDUSTRY?

I love the people! I had never seen an industry that was willing to share their successes. When I started going to tours and gatherings for the OAN Greenhouse Chapter, I met some of the Northwest greenhouse greats, including Kaz and Helen Tamura, Sean and Rosie Sullivan, Ginger Steele, Grace Dinsdale, Cheri and Eric Sigmund, Tommy Cammarota, >>

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Tom Verhoeven, Bill and Ellen Egan, Don Kondo, Bill and Chris Koida, and the entire Iwasaki family. I was astounded at how open and giving these folks were about the ups and downs of their businesses. It is rare that competitive companies would share solutions to their problems and congratulate each other on their successes.

### YOUR GREATEST CHALLENGE?

Uncertainty about the future, is always a challenge. I am not sure what the world will look like after the COVID-19 pandemic and economic conditions that lay ahead.

### WHAT MOTIVATES YOU TO GO TO WORK EVERY DAY?

My quality of life! Life is good. As a recent prostate cancer survivor — two years

clear! — I know every day is a blessing!

### WHAT ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF?

I am most proud of my family. Heidi, my wonderful partner of 27 years, We have raised three fiercely independent children: Megan, Dylan, and Charlie. And, we are so fortunate to enjoy two wonderful granddaughters: Maiya Ray and Talia Grace.

### WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF BEING INVOLVED WITH THE OREGON ASSOCIATION OF NURSERIES?

I have been involved with the OAN since 1991 in one way or another. Today my volunteer time is spent working with the OAN Government Relations Committee. That involves meeting with, and getting to learn from, leaders of all types in our industry and from our national and state legislative assemblies. The OAN

gives voice to growers and the allied trades, which brings great value to our industry. In a world of policy makers and stakeholders it is much better to have a seat at the table rather than be an item listed on the menu.

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

I would say the supercilious government regulation of almost every element of nursery and greenhouse production is the primary challenge for our industry. Ever-changing regulations of labor, energy, water, transportation, COVID-19 hygienics, and others layer on cost factors not previously budgeted for by operators and downstream associated industries. This threatens all aspects, and the very existence, of our industry. ©

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