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The silver linings of COVID-19

When the pandemic started, it threw our businesses and lives into chaos.

It was difficult to follow as scientists continually discovered more about the disease, and we all had to adapt. Social distancing slowed many of our plant production processes, and trips to the grocery store became infrequent.

As we come into September and the kids are going back to school by mostly staying home and taking classes remotely, there have been some silver linings to living and dealing through this COVID-19 year.

Travel restrictions have made all of us stay closer to home when summer vacations were planned. With everyone at home looking at their yards and patios, the nursery industry had strong spring and summer sales — up 8%, according to some reports. Nursery suppliers also saw strong sales; bark, pots, and chemicals all showed sales in the positive.

And it wasn't just the nursery industry and supply chain. *The Wall Street Journal* reported strong retail sales topping pre-pandemic levels through mid-August.

Foreign travel restrictions and personal trepidation to venture to common tourist attractions in large metro areas have led to an increase in state and federal park attendance. Many parks and trails saw more visitors, including many who have never ventured out hiking before.

These are all positives for health, but possibly more than just “getting fresh air.” In Japan, a Nippon Medical School study showed how spending time in nature boosted the body's natural immune system health and increased the production of white blood cells. Communing with nature in our yards or our vast park system is an easy way to socially distance and stay healthy.

The way the world conducts business has changed. Remote meetings and telecommuting have become commonplace in most industries. *Forbes* has reported that remote work has increased productivity by 47%. The OAN has hosted countless meetings with state and federal elected officials, including Gov. Kate Brown, and various state department heads. These Zoom meetings are well attended, with members throughout the state logging in from their offices or pickup trucks.

Anyone — almost anywhere — can log on and have an informative discussion with peers and get back to work without the cost of travel and time. This has allowed our volunteer leaders to cover a lot of ground and be active on many fronts. I can see this as an extremely useful tool in the post-pandemic world.

As of this writing there have been few COVID-19 related outbreaks at Oregon nurseries. Those that occurred were identified and resolved quickly and healthily. It is quite remarkable that the nursery industry has been working full time since the pandemic started with our own safety precautions in place, even before OSHA regulations came into effect in June.

I believe this is due to OAN getting information from state and federal health authorities to members quickly. Communication is key. From the start we have all been working on keeping a safe and healthy workplace.

The biggest positive outcome, for me, has been our personal lives slowing down. I know for my own family, with two young kids, we are constantly in motion. School, classes, games — oh, and sit-down dinners for the whole family. Under normal circumstances, life and weeks fly by. This past six months, I have totally enjoyed my kids being home with few obligations to attend.

Slowing down is not a bad thing, once in a while. I just hope I remember these silver linings when things pick back up and open up completely. ☺



Jim Simnitt
OAN PRESIDENT