

One industry, one voice

Welcome to the Advocacy

Issue of Digger.

We have devoted most of this issue to showing you how the Oregon Association of Nurseries gets involved in policymaking and advocacy on behalf of the members.

We wanted to take you “inside” and show you our mindset as well as the process and methods we follow. We are strong, engaged and reasoned. We hope more industry members will get involved, because involvement matters.

Recently, I spoke with Oregon Rep. Rob Nosse (D-Portland) about the upcoming 2021 legislative session. While we do not agree on most issues, he offered praise for OAN members. We put aside ego and we do what is in the best interest of the industry.

And people notice.

Several years ago, Rep. Nosse and I went on the campaign circuit to debate the increases in minimum wage. In mostly urban Oregon, our message was not the prevailing sentiment, but Rep. Nosse and I did the three things that needed to be done.

1. We debated vigorously. 2. We treated the other side with respect. 3. We never got personal.

The nursery community steps up

What a year. First the pandemic. Then the economic fragility and economic disruptions that resulted. After all that, the biggest wildfire in Oregon history, dwarfing the infamous Tillamook Burn that scorched 335,000 acres.

This one burned 1 million acres at press time and counting, all over the state, but the worst damage occurred in the foothills not too far from Oregon’s prime nursery production areas. Our fertile forests were transformed into post-apocalyptic landscapes resembling the planet Mars, like something we would see in a movie.

But when the chips are down, the nursery industry steps up. We saw this firsthand in places that many outside our state may not be familiar with — like the small town of Scotts Mills, population 400, where people joined together to hold off the blaze.

I have heard accounts of great caring and rapid assistance all throughout our state. Disasters bring out the peacock in a lot of people. Not nursery folks. We have seen

good people doing it to help a community, and not for social stature.

The chips are down in this election

Every election cycle, we hear from pundits that this “is the most important election in our lifetime.” As a veteran of many campaigns, I can tell you each election has a personality, and they all have consequences.

The 2020 ballot is its own brand of a wildfire. We have a presidential election, a state amid its worst budget situation in memory, a pandemic that has separated neighbors from each other, and the normal dose of doubt and poison as we careen toward November.

You have a voice. You are respected. We must act and vote in numbers that show that democracy is not just for those who happen to show up. Democracy, as an institution, is forged in active citizenry. If you don’t vote, you become a passive participant even as possible harm is done.

Oregon proves voting by mail works

There’s been some degree of fingernail gnawing over vote by mail. People conjure up visions of Russian interference or rampant fraud. Some fear we may not end up with a valid election.

Let’s not kid ourselves. Our election officials must remain vigilant. Most of the states are trying to figure out ways to put their absentee ballot process on steroids, so the vote is accessible to all, regardless of the circumstances of COVID-19.

Here in Oregon, remote voting is old hat. Our state’s voters settled the issue in 1998, when we overwhelmingly voted to expand mail-in voting to primary and general elections. Two years later, Oregon became the first state in the U.S. to conduct a presidential election with mail-in voting.

If any state could discern if there has been voter fraud, it stands to reason it would be the Beaver State. Candidly, every Secretary of State — no matter the party affiliation — has certified our electoral process as legitimate. There are significant precautions against fraud. Each voter receives one, and only one, ballot. Ballot return signatures are verified against state records.

The good news around the country is that more people have asked for their absen-



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tee ballots than ever before. No amount of doubt about the United States Postal Service can erase the basic duty to cast a ballot.

A new population of voters

Across the U.S., the 13,238 Americans born on September 11, 2001, represented the few rays of promise on a dark day. Now this cohort of voters, shaped by terror attacks, school shootings and a pandemic, will vote in their first presidential election.

My youngest daughter, Carolyn, was born shortly after 9/11 in November and is engaged. Now this group can be more than simple bystanders. Rather, they can wield an incredible force of self-determination. This 56-year-old hopes they jump at the chance.

Use your voice

We have seen the “rigged election” movie before. The nation endured it and learned from it.

The 1864 presidential race between Grover Cleveland — New York’s Democratic governor — and James Blaine — a Republican former speaker of the House, senator from Maine and secretary of state — was an especially ugly one. Accusations of ballot box stuffing ensued, and the nation was not clear on the winner.

The only winner in the 2020 election if you do not vote is apathy.

An old, effective political ploy is if you doubt the result, create pandemonium on the process. Voter suppression takes many forms. This election cycle has enough challenges in it without falling prey to conspiracy theories.

Here is one thing you can control. It does not matter where you land as a Democrat, a Republican or neither — we are all Americans. Get out and vote! ☺