

# Leading with a purpose

The Oregon Association of Nurseries (OAN) remains, by its very definition and mission, a member-driven, service- and advocacy-oriented green industry force.

It seems like a decade ago back in March 2020 when the industry and country were tossed into the abyss of COVID-19. Now that the last chapter of 2020 is being written, we should count our blessings. As a student of history, I believe this year will define our lives much like the Great Depression and World War II did to those who preceded us.

These are trying times and not all of us made it through. We have lost family members, both personally and industry-wise. The cumulative impact of harm to the health of our bodies and the economy was just too much for valued and treasured people.

What should not be missed and celebrated is that this year significantly revealed our strength, determination and most of all — our character.

As your executive director, I had the genuine honor to have a front row seat to countless acts of kindness, faith and egoless assistance to fellow members and neighbors, and dedicated leadership by Jim Simnitt and the entire OAN Board of Directors. They acted with steady hands, steely eyes and stupendous vision during a year that had a caustic political campaign for president, a pandemic that separated loves ones and customers, and the specter of unnerving economic dynamics.

Industry members did what they do best — grow phenomenal plants, take care of employees, and bring a modicum of joy to yards and hearts throughout the state and country through investment in our living environment.

## The metaphor of the fires

This fall, Oregon and its citizens absorbed a Mike Tyson right hook with a

series of fires that scorched over a million acres of land and caused \$600 million in damages. Coming on the heels of COVID-19, these were a biblical test of the industry's nerve.

First, they adjusted to a nefarious pandemic. Check. Then they pushed through uncertain market conditions and shutdowns on a daily and weekly basis. Done. Next, they watched neighbors verbally impale each other during one of the nastiest presidential campaigns since the Civil War Era Reconstruction.

And then, these fires. Some of our members even lost homes and possessions.

How did the industry respond? They helped neighbors who lost power keep their plants watered. They lent equipment and labor in a pinch. They stayed socially distant, ever focused on coronavirus

protocols, even as smoke choked the Willamette Valley so badly that Beaverton looked like Beijing. They gave each other their unflinching support.

The OAN helped here and there. We were an active voice

at the national, state and local level. All that is true. But the OAN staff knows what I know. YOU are the leaders that show a strong sense of purpose.

## Magic 8-ball of 2021

As a total political dork, the thing that brings me to tears is not the success or failure of an election result. It's not some sense of confidence in the unmatched possibility of a fresh set of months ahead of us.

What brings me to tears is the peaceful transition of power of our presidency. It serves as a real-time demonstration, to the world of America's trust in the people — even if our process is messy and contentious.

Transitions are natural. They shape us. However, it is important that this notion rings true all across our beautiful nation. Former President Barack Obama spoke of it four years ago as he finished his second term, but it's not his notion alone:

"I have instructed my team to follow



Jeff Stone  
OAN EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

the example that President Bush's team set eight years ago, and work as hard as we can to make sure that this is a successful transition for the president-elect — because we are now all rooting for his success in uniting and leading the country. The peaceful transition of power is one of the hallmarks of our democracy. And over the next few months, we are going to show that to the world.

"Now, everybody is sad when their side loses an election. But the day after, we must remember that we're all on one team. This is an intramural scrimmage. We're not Democrats first. We're not Republicans first. We are Americans first. We're patriots first. We all want what's best for this country. So, this was a long and hard-fought campaign. A lot of our fellow Americans are exultant today. A lot of Americans are less so. But that's the nature of campaigns. That's the nature of democracy. It is hard, and sometimes contentious and noisy, and it's not always inspiring."

## Moving forward together

All in all, as we close the chapter of a meme-rich year, I am proud of the nursery and greenhouse industry. We made peace and were forced to embrace that we cannot control everything that comes at us.

The great John Wooden once said, "Be more concerned with your character than your reputation, because your character is what you really are, while your reputation is merely what others think you are ... the true test of a man's character is what he does when no one is watching."

Thank you all for your support, generosity to the industry and association. I look forward to working hard for you in 2021! ©