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**The greatest benefit of all**

**We often hear the phrase, "Membership has its benefits."**

When we invest in a membership organization or cause, we expect to see a financial or emotional return on that investment.

The Oregon Association of Nurseries (OAN) offers several programs that directly impact your bottom line, with a prime example being our health and dental insurance programs. They can offer substantial savings over what you find elsewhere in the marketplace. Trucks to Trade Shows has been a great way to save money shipping our quality Oregon nursery stock to shows across the country. These benefits — along with the everyday savings offered to members through our credit card processing, bulk/cardlock fuel, and office supply discounts — bring great value to all members, large and small.

The association also brings us exposure to the national marketplace. The Farwest Show and Nursery Guide do a fantastic job of promoting our quality growers and products to the world. These are great tools for bring together buyers and sellers.

But to me, the most important benefit the OAN delivers is the connection between members.

We recently held our annual convention, and this year, we had to do it online. This was a new experience for us. Of course, we conducted the association's usual business, installing new officers and updating members on the financials. However, none of us will forget the first annual "Plant Wars"-themed virtual Happy Hour. We had members show up from all corners of the galaxy, dressed as their favorite Star Wars characters.

It was a night filled with games, funny videos, lots of laughter, and as any good OAN party, lots of spirits.

This is the part of OAN membership that often goes overlooked. Some of the closest bonds with our own family were built through the OAN. Growing up in the industry, nearly every social gathering we had

involved another grower or associate member. These end up being the people we turn to quite often, either for problem solving in our business, or just a night on the town.

If you had asked me 20 years ago, I never would have imagined that a greenhouse salesman would be a groomsman on my wedding day. Now, I couldn't imagine choosing anyone else for that role.

I'll never forget the flood of nursery friends that packed a high school gym on senior night to honor the daughter of one of our own. It was probably the largest, most raucous crowd this group of girls had played in front of all year. We would all do it again in a heartbeat.

Yes, membership has its benefits, but you also get out of membership what you put into it.

I have gained so much from my involvement with the OAN, much of which has helped advance my professional abilities. More importantly, I've gained a group of friends I know I can turn to for anything. These relationships built over the years are something we will all be able to take with us long after our nursery careers are over.

To me, that member benefit is worth every penny. ☺



Kyle Fessler

**But to me, the most important connection the OAN creates is the connection between members.**