

Access the booths and videos at
www.NurseryGuideLIVE.com until:

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APRIL
5

Download Booth Literature
 THE EVERDE STORY
 NICHOLAS STADDON - FEATURED TR

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 var. marginata**
 Everde Growers™
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**Agave bracteosa
 'Calamar'**
 Everde Growers™
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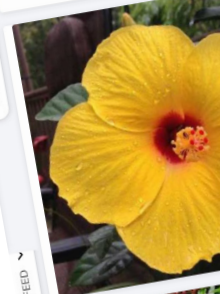
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Mikaela Eaton took advantage of
 using the Nursery Guide LIVE virtual
 marketplace right from her desktop.
 PHOTO BY MIKAELA EATON.

Products



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Nursery Guide clicks into place

oan's first virtual show connected the industry in a new way in March

BY JON BELL

ZEN LANDIS, THE Oregon Association of Nurseries' events and education manager, knows what it's like to prepare for and help run a big and important professional association event like OAN's annual Farwest Show. You prepare for months, deal with logistics and coordination, get the basics set up and then, come showtime, open the doors and kick it off.

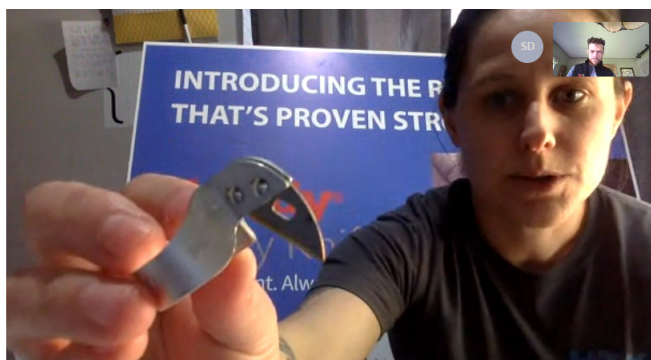
"The whole thing just goes into a huge blur and then you're like, 'What just happened?'" said Landis, who's been involved with OAN events for the past two years. "That's how it goes from the event planner side of things."

Turns out that the same rush and wave of frenetic energy needed to set up a virtual event. Landis said she felt it during the first-ever Nursery Guide LIVE, an interactive marketplace for the OAN buyer's guide and website. The membership needed the event because the Farwest Show was sidelined by COVID-19 in fall 2020.

Held March 18–19 on desktop computers, laptops and mobile

devices around the country — and even around the world — Nursery Guide LIVE offered nursery industry vendors and customers a chance to interact, learn, buy and research in a way they never really have been able to before. It wasn't a substitute for the face-to-face interactions that the nursery industry thrives on, but it filled a void and gave a glimpse at just how a virtual event could become a part of the bigger picture in the future.

"We are happy and pleased with having had to jump on board with a virtual online business-to-business platform," said Allan Niemi, director of events for the OAN. "We see potential for this, especially in the way that we're able to service all sectors of the industry. Yes, people do want face-to-face trade shows like Farwest, but there's also just a real convenience behind a virtual marketplace that really caters



Megyn Pike, customer service representative at Handy Safety Knife offered demonstrations of their ring knife. The compact tool works for people needing to cut twine, tape, and other materials off and on throughout the day. CAPTURE BY OREGON ASSOCIATION OF NURSERIES

Nursery Guide LIVE clicks into place

Center, top: Digital strategist Monica Hemmingway presents "Five Keys to Getting Your Green Industry Business Found Online in 2021" on March 17. **Center, bottom:** Dave Malenfant, director of the Center for Supply Chain Innovation at the Texas Christian University presents "Future Trends in Logistics: Partnering for Success" the following day on March 18. CAPTURE BY OREGON ASSOCIATION OF NURSERIES

to buyers and sellers. We're looking forward to the future opportunities that a virtual event can provide."

COVID curveballs

Like just about everything else in the world, the trade show scene got turned on its head in spring 2020 with arrival of COVID-19. Shows far and wide, including Cultivate'20 (Columbus, Ohio) and the 2021 Mid-Atlantic Nursery Trade Show (Baltimore), shifted to online options.

When the OAN was forced to cancel the Farwest Show last August, the association did not rush to offer a virtual substitute right away. It instead planned Nursery Guide LIVE. The association teamed up with Showmetry to create the online experience, which would allow exhibitors to showcase their products and services and interact with prospects in virtual booths.

Nursery Guide LIVE was all set to launch February 17-18, but then an epic snow and ice storm thumped the Portland-Metro region, knocking out power for days and damaging nurseries in the area. Show organizers postponed the event for a month, and it went live for two days March 17-18.

The first-ever event, sponsored by **the HC Companies**, featured dozens of exhibitors and drew hundreds of attendees from across the U.S., Canada and even overseas. Exhibitors ranged from nurseries offering nursery stock, seedlings, plants, trees and other materials to container manufacturers, associations and nonprofits, and providers of insurance, software and other services.

The Showmetry platform allowed exhibitors to upload videos and photos, highlight products, share company information and offer educational presentations. It also gave exhibitors and attendees the oppor-

tunity to trade contact information and connect directly through a Zoom-like interface.

"It was really easy in terms of user setup," said Leigh Schaffer, marketing manager for **Everde Growers**,



a nursery with 14 farm locations across four states. "It was really easy to showcase our brand and products in multiple ways. We uploaded videos and multiple photos, and having our brand video there really helped make our booth a place people wanted to visit virtually."

Though there were some technical difficulties in trying to chat with booth visitors in real time, Everde nonetheless had nearly 170 visitors, many of which could turn out to be positive leads.

"We are a passionate sales team and we'll take every opportunity to follow up with everyone who

visited our booth," said Nicholas Staddon, company spokesperson and plantsman for Everde. "I think it's terrific that the OAN made the effort at such a busy time of year for everyone."

Education for all

In addition to the sales opportunities Nursery Guide LIVE provided, educational sessions also offered enrichment to attendees. The Handy Safety Knife Company, which makes small utility knives that fit on the finger, held several video sessions on how to use its products, and Staddon hosted multiple "Plant Chat" sessions where he talked about new tropicals that Everde is carrying. Staddon's presentation is available for download at the company's virtual booth through April 5.

Nursery Guide LIVE kicked off each morning with keynote speakers, which were sponsored by *GrowerTalks/Green Profit* magazine. The Wednesday keynote featured licensed arborist, digital strategist and indus-

trial psychologist Monica Hemmingway. Her presentation, "Five Keys To Getting Your Green Industry Business Found Online in 2021," covered the importance of having a strong web presence and how nurseries can increase their online visibility.

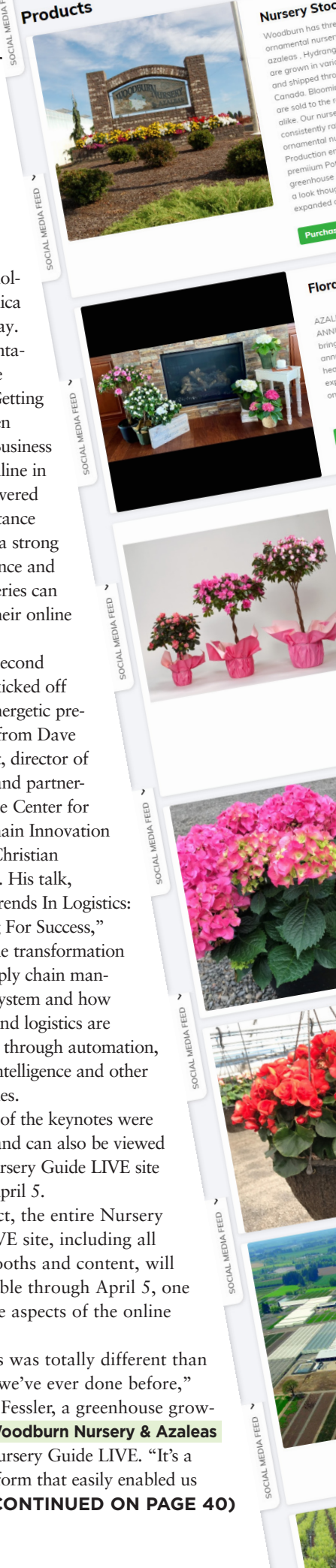
The second morning kicked off with an energetic presentation from Dave Malenfant, director of outreach and partnerships at the Center for Supply Chain Innovation at Texas Christian University. His talk, "Future Trends In Logistics: Partnering For Success," covered the transformation of the supply chain management system and how shipping and logistics are advancing through automation, artificial intelligence and other technologies.

Both of the keynotes were recorded and can also be viewed on the Nursery Guide LIVE site through April 5.

In fact, the entire Nursery Guide LIVE site, including all vendor booths and content, will be accessible through April 5, one of the nice aspects of the online platform.

"This was totally different than anything we've ever done before," said Kyle Fessler, a greenhouse grower with **Woodburn Nursery & Azaleas Inc.**, of Nursery Guide LIVE. "It's a good platform that easily enabled us

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Nursery Guide LIVE clicks into place

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to showcase our items and also our different divisions that a lot of people might not really know about.”

Though it's busy season for nurseries and he didn't have too much time to peruse other booths during Nursery Guide LIVE, Fessler said the event was a good marketing tool for Woodburn Nursery & Azaleas.

“I think it went really well,” he said. “We used it more as a marketing tool and working on building our brand. There was a lot of good information out there, and I think it's really something that can grow and be a good tool for the association.”

The hybrid ahead

And that, in fact, is just how the association is looking at Nursery Guide LIVE for the future.

Niemi said the technology will

continue to evolve, making the virtual marketplace experience even better with new advances. He also said OAN is thinking about making Nursery Guide LIVE an annual event that would occur in the winter, sort of a virtual supplement to the annual in-person Farwest Show in August. The latter trade show is currently scheduled for August 18–20 in Portland, though the association will be watching COVID-19 restrictions and requirements closely.

Staddon, from Everde, said the online option for trade shows seems likely to become more commonplace, especially as a component of a hybrid option that features both in-person and online options. It won't ever replace the traditional trade show, which is a key aspect of the nursery industry, but there's a lot of opportunity for it to enrich the entire industry in the future.

“As an industry, we are very social. We

like to see each other, meet new people and maintain relationships we've had. We like to see the plants, what they look like and feel like, what their fragrance is,” Staddon said. “But there's also a lot of opportunity (in online platforms) and I think OAN should not back down from it. There's an opportunity to really think out of the box and put something great together.” ☺

Jon Bell is a freelance journalist based in Oregon who writes about everything from craft beer and real estate to the great outdoors. He can be reached at jontbell@comcast.net.

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