

# A pause for appreciation

This is my 126<sup>th</sup> column as your executive director, and a lot has happened in the last 10½ years.

As a history nerd, I went back to find the oldest version of *Digger* I could. I was able to locate Issue #2 (ever), from June 1956. The Oregon Association of Nurserymen, as it was known then, was under the leadership of Melvin Surface.

In this column, I will contrast what was going on back then versus now, reflect on the proud foundation which the industry provided us, and make a couple observations as we kick off April.

## The nation in 1956

In 1956, Elvis Presley's "Heartbreak Hotel" was coursing through the radio as America was introduced to the King of Rock n' Roll on the Ed Sullivan Show. President Dwight D. Eisenhower won reelection easily in a rematch with Adlai Stevenson, and the nation was embarking on fulfilling a top priority of the administration — the interstate highway system.

The federal budget was \$62.4 billion — compare that with the present day, where President Joe Biden just signed a stand-alone spending bill for COVID-19 that was almost \$2 trillion — and only one in three pursued a college education. Gas was 22 cents a gallon, a home cost \$11,700 and the average salary was under \$5,000.

Yahtzee was uttered for the first time, Certs was a cause of debate for why that minty taste did not have any actual mint in it, and the nation was introduced to The Price is Right — but there was no young Bob Barker. Bill Cullen was the host.

## During the 'I like Ike' years

Under this backdrop, our very own nursery industry was gaining attraction from eastern growers. Trains were coming out west to take a gander at the operations in Oregon.

Alfred Tuefel was bringing forward a notion of using temperature control and shipping dynamics that accounted for what happens to a plant on the long journey to its customer. *Digger's* original focus was Oregon, Washington, Montana, Idaho,

Northern California and British Columbia. The contents showcased what Oregon was doing, and the magazine promised it "might give an idea or two."

Pests and diseases were a concern. The "holly leaf miner" had been detected and the Oregon Department of Agriculture gave a clean bill of health to growers in the state.

However, the most intriguing information in the magazine was the Agricultural Census that demonstrated the increasing importance of horticulture. National growth in nursery stock from 1949 to 1954 (reported in 1956) rose to \$450 million. Federal census takers "observed" that ornamental horticulture, particularly the production and distribution of woody products, was on the rise.

A 40% growth rate between the two census reports was a true harbinger of the growth potential of the industry over the next 65 years.

## Things that bind us

Melvin Surface's message in 1956 was, "I know you are busier than the dickens right now." That's as true now as it was then! Trucks continue to bring your bounty to the public, which then affirms the beauty of the plants and trees that our state grows.

Oregon has been blessed by elite growing conditions, available water, and a rigid pest and disease protocol that adds up to the highest quality material in world. Through hard work, dedicated growers and retailers have grown material that has stood the test of time.

In 1956, the association was looking forward to convention in Gearhart, Oregon, and *Digger Magazine* was a tether between the members and the larger industry.

Today, *Digger* is the gold standard for an industry news source and dedicated staff work hard to bring relevant content. For 2021, we are upgrading that convention a tad. The association is planning to make good on its plans to go to Hawaii this November 2-4 (save the dates). Maui sounds nice right about now.

## 2021 and looking forward

When President Eisenhower proposed investing in an Interstate Highway System and in infrastructure needs up and down the



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economy, he had his doubters. His experience in World War II showed him that other countries were well ahead on the basics of moving goods and people, so business markets could be expanded. In 2021, we have the same opportunity to look ahead. The issues may be different, but the common denominator then and now is nurseries.

Climate is a hotly debated issue. Time and again, the OAN has pointed to the benefits of plants and trees to mitigate emissions. Water infrastructure is consistently kicked down the road, but much like Ike's highway project, the economic multiplier effect of delivery of water is 10 times that.

Labor continues to be a challenge that vexes agriculture across the country. There is finally a window that must be taken by Congress to fix the broken immigration system. Otherwise, other investments will not yield their amazing possibilities. President Eisenhower looks smart in the judgement of history — I hope that President Biden is viewed that way in the decades to come. Time will tell.

## Spring is here

2021 started out with some challenges for sure, but to me, April is the growing season when flowers explode on the landscape. Nominal warmth is t-shirt time, and the step — yes, that has a spring to it as well. Even the rain cannot get us down. The public can recite "April showers bring May flowers," as winter's last grasp opens a season when the nursery industry shines.

We still can recognize the ties that bind the industry together. It's you and other people who make this industry as wonderful as it is. Happy spring! ☺