

# MEET THE LEADER

The voices of Oregon's nursery industry

## TELL US ABOUT YOURSELF

I grew up in the nursery business. My parents, Joe and Judy Dula, started Dula's Nursery in Canby, Oregon, in the late 1970s. They bought Rex Denison's 40-acre tree farm and converted it from a field-grown operation to an ornamental deciduous and conifer tree seedling farm. From about 4th grade on, I helped at every level of production. My parents began exhibiting at the Farwest Show and connected with Henry "By" Sprenger II, owner of Nevada-based Moana Nursery. At the time, his garden center had one store and he worked with my parents to source products in Oregon. Through their business relationship, I got to know By very well as a kid.

After graduating from Canby High School, I took a couple of community college-level courses for a few things. I once attended an Oregon State University orientation to look at their horticulture program, but nearly everything that they said we would learn was stuff I was already doing in the nursery now — and I was already getting paid for it. I would have liked to get a college education, but I also had practical field experience to get me through.

The recession of the early 1980s ultimately put my parents out of business. They lost the farm, and I was without a job. However, Moana Nursery had just started a nursery production supply site over in Barlow. By asked if I was interested in working for him to grow the new material for his retail stores and consumer/commercial landscape business. Happy for the offer, I started working at Moana Nursery in 1983. I was one of the crew members when there were only five employees. The nursery was managed by Al Hanson, who would eventually go on to retire in 1987. Once Al had left, By said to me, "Here you go, kid! The job's yours to lose, if you want it."

In the same year, I married my high school sweetheart, Nancy. Together we have two amazing daughters, Ellen and Elizabeth.

## WHAT'S YOUR GUIDING PRINCIPLE?

Do the right thing. Be honest. Be direct.



## Joe Dula

General Manager

Moana Nursery, Canby, Oregon

OAN member since 2012

### OAN roles/positions:

- Farwest Show committee member.
- OAN Board – Container Grower Position #3
- Clayton W. Hannon Distinguished Service Award, 2019

## WHAT'S A GOAL YOU HAVE YET TO ACHIEVE?

My goal is to retire sometime prior to my demise.

## WHAT'S THE BEST BUSINESS DECISION YOU'VE EVER MADE?

I would say the best business decision I have made in my career was to continue moving towards offering more containerized plant material for sale. Compared to the field-grown balled and burlap plants, the production process has been working out better for the company. We grow a variety of products that work well in high-desert climates. The containerized product allows us to have yearlong sales instead of seasonal windows in spring and fall.

## HARDEST BUSINESS DECISION

In 2009, after the Great Recession, I had to let go of more than 30 hard-working employees. There was just no way to make payroll and keep the winter crew. We cut

down to a skeleton crew of three for a few winters to get by.

## WHAT'S YOUR GREATEST MISSED OPPORTUNITY?

I should have purchased some real estate opportunities years ago when I had the chance. I'm not a big gambler, and stretching my budget to the limit is a risk I don't often take. But, if there's anything I've learned, you rarely lose on a property investment.

## WHO IS YOUR MOST SIGNIFICANT MENTOR?

By Sprenger was a great mentor. He founded the nursery in 1967 with his father in Reno and knew the industry well. He just had good common sense. Because of that, we got along very well. Offering me a job when I was just 19 years old meant a lot. Together, we would work on any topic — finances, employees, you-name-it — from all the angles that made sense.

## BEST BUSINESS ADVICE:

"What would you do if it was your money?" Since I have worked for someone most of my life, I always make decisions with someone else's money. By and I would have discussions about the business, and he would ask me that question. I think of this often.

## WHAT DO YOU LOVE MOST ABOUT THE NURSERY INDUSTRY?

The variety of duties and changes in the industry make the job really interesting. It is a seasonal business, but it is never the same each time around.

## WHAT IS YOUR GREATEST CHALLENGE?

Employees and accountants are my two biggest challenges. It seems like I'm always trying to build a solid crew that works well together on and off the field. But, once I get one, it's difficult to get them to stay for more than a year or two. As far as accountants go ... things do not always go as planned when running the day-to-day operations. Explaining what happened down to the exact dollar each month can feel like a burden. >>



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## Meet the Leader

### WHAT MOTIVATES YOU TO GO TO WORK EVERY DAY?

I'm fortunate to have a lot to look forward to each day. I love my family and work to make sure they're taken care of. I feel a sense of purpose with my responsibilities to my job and the nursery industry. There is always work to be done, and I feel like I need to be there to see it through to the end.

### WHAT ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF?

Having worked for a company for a long time, I'm proud to be at a place in my career where I am trusted to handle things on my own. I treat the job as if I own the business, even if it belongs to someone else.

### INVOLVEMENT WITH OAN:

I've been going to the Farwest Show most of my life. Moana Nursery has been an OAN member since 1980. Through them, I've been a committee member and volunteer for the OAN's trade show, and I was honored to receive the Clayton Hannon Distinguished Service award for the time I dedicated to the industry. It is important that many smaller individual companies form a big group with a powerful, strong voice to deal with the many issues the industry will face. Our members are all aware of the never-ending list of grand ideas that other people think should be put into place that will affect your business.

### IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT ARE THE MOST CRITICAL CHALLENGES FACING THE NURSERY INDUSTRY TODAY?

Labor will continue to be a huge issue for our businesses — both the lack of people in the workforce and the increasing costs to keep them. The second biggest challenge is shipping. Trucking for the nursery industry is critical and continues to get more expensive and tougher to schedule. Government regulations, interference, and taxes are also forced on the industry and business owners. There are never any reductions in these areas, only more additions. ☺



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