

## La familia de viveros e invernaderos

### The word “familia” has a long history of referring to close relations or connections.

In Spanish, “la familia” variously refers in English to one’s family, circle of friends and coworkers, teammates, or other close communities or organizations. So, as many of you will know, the Spanish headline above refers to “the family of nurseries and greenhouses.”

Much has been made over the course of the year about the deeply rooted connection that agriculture has with our largely Hispanic workforce. To a person in the industry, the bond of growing the highest quality plants in the world is matched by shared experience and family. Despite the best efforts of politicians, agriculture is one body — one family.

### Christmas time in the Stone house

The Christmas holiday is a precious one in my home. My wife’s phenomenal cooking blends traditional holiday food such as turkey, mashed potatoes and a ridiculous amount of gravy with tailored dishes such as lasagna, tamales, and mac and cheese. And homemade rolls! These golden-brown delights are tossed like footballs to one end of the table to the other.

The strong scent of a cut Christmas tree, my adult girls decorating like an artist on a blank canvas, barely passable wrapped gifts (guess what I do), and the strangest of traditions: gravy shots (choose a shot glass and down goes the turkey gravy — scalding your esophagus is optional).

The wonderful thing about the holidays is that tradition is what you make it.

### Eshraghi tour with holiday wreaths

Getting out and touring our member organizations is something that puts some spring in my step. Over the last two months, Eshraghi Nursery has been the focus of several legislative tours with local state legislators, the state treasurer, and the labor commissioner.

Hearing directly from owner Linda Eshraghi, manager Chris Lee and longtime workers paints an all-too-familiar picture of

demanding work, quality craftsmanship and a family atmosphere. Part of the tour of the nursery operation, this time of year, is the process of creating Christmas and holiday wreaths. The aroma alone is compelling — and the quality material that goes to our retail garden centers cannot be matched.

Linda describes it best. After learning from other nursery operations, she started her own business. The Farmington Gardens website tells the story. Her first funds came from wholesaling Christmas wreaths, which soon led to a humble local plant booth. “It just looked like a tiny roadside stand. It was beyond simple,” she recalls.

Not long after, in 1989, Eshraghi Nursery was formed, and several years after, in 1994, Farmington Gardens was established as a permanent retail outlet for the plants and trees she was growing.

Today, the looks of awe by elected officials as they peek into the process and production of a holiday staple was hard to miss. Who gets the credit for success of the growing and retail stories? Linda is quick to give it to her employees. And the stories — mostly translated from Spanish — attest how a family operation is inclusive and rewards hard work.

### Convention as a family event

As December takes hold, the warmth (literally) of our recent OAN Convention still is felt. Not only was this the first trip to Maui for my wife and me, but the trip was defined by the nursery families coming together. Kids and pools go together like egg-nog and fireplaces.

Yes, we celebrated our volunteer leaders and handed out awards to deserving members, including lifetime memberships to Terry Thornton, Kathy LeCompte, Doug Zielinski, and Tom Fessler. Mark Bigej was honored with the Outstanding Service Award, Ben Verhoeven as the Emerging Leader, and the Farwest Show as the Committee of the Year.

Convention is for the members, and they should be celebrated. The membership got a deep dive into the Maui culture with the staff of the Grand Wailea, and we were warmly greeted by Maui’s mayor, Mike Victorino.



Jeff Stone  
OAN EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

But what made 2021 so special — pure and simple — was the next generation of family members running on the beach, exploring the pool and showing us old people how to do the rope swing. We had Fesslers, Staehelys, Robinsons, Nelsons (both Hans Nelson and Bountiful Farms varieties) and others blending together as the sun-soaked parents and grandparents looked on.

My failure at the rope swing went viral and was an unmitigated disaster. Jennifer and I sat by the pool’s “lazy river” and waved to the throngs of kids floating by. Laughter and smiles were not in short supply.

Whether on fertile Willamette Valley soil or the tropical sands of Hawaii, the nursery family was together. Stories of when Tom Fessler took the reigns over 25 years ago — handing his newborn son Noah to the Bigej family — was matched by the Staehely children snagging their uncle Jim Simnitt and myself to go down the slides.

We will be back in four years, but this is the plug to plan for Convention in 2022. We will be in the Northwest next time, but the fun and family atmosphere travels wherever you go.

### Counting blessings

There is no doubt that the last two years has been a rollercoaster ride with uncertainty of markets due to COVID and supply chain disruptions. You have been resilient to make it through wildfires, ice storms and a heat dome. For every challenge is a blessing. You have each other and that makes any year worth celebrating.

On behalf of the OAN and your hard-working staff and board of directors, I wish you a blessed holiday season and may we look forward to 2022. ☺